





















**LETTERS,**  
**CHIEFLY**  
**PRACTICAL AND CONSOLATORY :**  
**DESIGNED TO ILLUSTRATE**  
**THE NATURE AND TENDENCY**  
**OF**  
**THE GOSPEL.**

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**BY DAVID RUSSELL, D.D**  
**DUNDEE.**

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These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full, — 1 John i. 4

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**FIFTH EDITION.**

**EDINBURGH :**  
**WILLIAM WHYTE & CO.**  
**BOOKSELLERS TO HER MAJESTY ;**  
**LONGMAN AND CO. LONDON ; W. COLLINS, GLASGOW ;**  
**AND W. CURRY, JUN. AND CO. DUBLIN.**

**MDCCCLXXVII.**



LONDON:  
Printed by BALFOUR & JACK, NINDRY STREET.



## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following Letters were addressed, for the most part, to persons in affliction. They are not, however, merely consolatory. Sorrow is the fruit of sin, and therefore its true cure lies only in that medicinal truth which purifies the heart, and "saves and sets the sinner free." With this conviction, it was the Writer's object in these Letters to state that great truth in the different lights and connections in which it appears in Scripture. The individuals to whom they were written believed that they received benefit from them, and they thought that others might do so likewise.—This is the history of their publication.







## CONTENTS.

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	Page
LET. 1. On the Sufferings of Christ,.....	1
2. On the Glory of Christ,.....	18
3. On the Invitations and Promises of the Gospel,.....	31
4. On the Design of our Lord's Mission,.....	47
5. Thoughts on the Law and the Gospel,.....	71
6. On Christian Comfort,.....	87
7. On the Practical Influence of the Truth,.....	105
8. Hints on the Means and Happy Effects of Sanctifica- tion,.....	118
9. On the Perseverance of Christians,.....	133
10. On the Death of a Relative,.....	154
11. On the Benefit of affliction,.....	166
12. On our Lord's Answer to the Sons of Zebedee... ..	185
13. On the Diversity of Degrees in Glory,.....	206
14. On some Difficulties relative to coming to Christ,.....	233
15. On Christian Confidence in Prayer,.....	254
16. Hints on the proper method of Instructing Inquirers, .....	276
17. The same subject continued.....	292
18. On Justification,.....	312
19. On Faith, as the medium of Justification,.....	336
20. On the Gracious and Consolatory Nature of The Gospel,.....	369
21. The same subject continued.....	387
22. General Remarks on Renovation of Character,.....	417
23. Practical Reflections on the Necessity of Faith, and of the Work of the Spirit,.....	436
24. On the Connexion between Faith, and Renovation of Character,.....	448
25. Thoughts on the Reasoning of James, on the Justifi- cation of Abraham,.....	462
26. On the Manner in which the Scriptures introduce the Divine purposes,.....	480
27. On the Maintenance of Christian Confidence,.....	512
28. On the Lord's Supper,.....	542
29. On the Contemplation of the Heavenly Temple,.....	568
30. On the Heavenly Sabbath,.....	587









# LETTERS,

## PRACTICAL AND CONSOLATORY.

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### LETTER I.

#### ON THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

General observations on the sufferings of Christ—They continued through his life—The nature of those he endured in Gethsemane and on the Cross—Their expiatory design—Were inflicted by God as the lawgiver—Flowed from a sense of the evil of sin, and of the Divine displeasure, and from the desertion of his Father—This typified under the law—Were endured in circumstances of shame—Were increased by the powers of darkness, and by many other secondary causes; and terminated in death.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE sufferings of Christ constitute so important a part of Christianity, and are so prominently exhibited in Scripture, that our comfort and deportment in religion must be much influenced by our views of their nature and design. To this subject, allow me to direct your attention in the present letter. I do not mean to confine myself to the last scene of his sorrows, but to take a general view of the nature of all that he suffered. Neither do I intend to dwell on his afflictions, apart from the principles of his character. It is not difficult to see that, in considering the history of his humiliation, we ought to contemplate not only his sufferings in themselves, but particularly their causes—the admirable principles, motives, and views, which animated him in bearing them; and also their glorious issue, both as



it regards God and man. We ought not, therefore, to view them as we would do any tragical scene; but with a constant eye on their peculiar nature, and the character which they served to develop.

I begin with observing, that it appears from Scripture, the sufferings of our Lord continued through life; and that his one righteousness includes the whole of his obedience and his death. It is wrong to confine his righteousness to any one part of his humiliation and woe. The Scriptures represent it as including all that he did; in taking upon him our nature; in perfectly obeying the divine law; in submitting to the pains, sorrows, and sufferings, which so grievously afflicted him; and in giving himself an offering and a sacrifice unto God. These all form that one work by which the glory of the Divine character is vindicated and illustrated; the law magnified and made honourable; and a way opened through which God appears the just God, and yet the Saviour.

But though his sufferings continued through life, they were not at all times equally severe. There were times in which he enjoyed comparative ease, and there were seasons of gladness which occasionally brightened the dark and dreary path of his humiliation. He rejoiced in spirit when he saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven, and when the Samaritans were about to acknowledge him, he said to his disciples that he had meat to eat that they knew not of. As he stood in the room of sinners, it behoved him to suffer all those miseries to which they are obnoxious through life; while, at the same time, as God exercises much long-suffering and forbearance towards them, and moderates the evils of life, by many instances of kindness; so, in like manner, the Saviour, when on earth, had not always the same sense of the painful effects of our sins, but sometimes enjoyed a measure of gladness, till the hour and power of darkness came, when the unmixed curse of the violated law of Heaven fell upon his devoted head. How comfortable is it to us, that his joy



arose from the conversion of sinners ; that his intervals of gladness were seasons in which the salvation of the guilty was contemplated as the certain and blissful result of his work !

But as he had seasons of gladness, so he had also many seasons of extreme distress in the course of his life. Gethsemane and Calvary were not the *only* scenes of his sorrow. Before the last and awful conflict in the garden and on the cross, he exclaimed, “ Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say ? ” This marks the deep and distressful agitation of his spirit, and must be viewed as similar to what he endured in the night on which he was betrayed. “ In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears.” “ The days of his flesh ” include more than the hour of his agony in Gethsemane, and his distressing hours upon the cross—they must include the entire period of his humiliation, and particularly that of his public ministry. We accordingly find, from the history of these days, that he dismissed the multitude and his disciples, and then retired, not to repose himself, but to pray, Matth. xiv. 23, 25 ; that, rising at a very early hour, he went to a solitary place, and there prayed, Mark i. 35 ; that he went to a mountain to pray, and continued in that exercise the whole of the night, Luke vi. 12 ; and that, when he went to the Mount of Olives, after the observance of the passover, it was as *he was wont*, Luke xxii. 39. Compare all this with what is said of the nature of those prayers, and of the circumstances in which they were offered, in those psalms in which he is the speaker. His language in Psalm xxii. 2. cannot refer merely to what took place in his last agony in the garden ; for that took place about midnight ; and here he says, “ O my God, I cry in the *day*-time, but thou hearest not ; ” neither can it refer merely to what took place on the cross, because that happened during the *day* ; and here he says, that he cried unto God in “ the *night season*.” Nor is this all. The words cannot be confined to *any one* particular



night and day, but are clearly expressive of daily and nightly *continual* sorrow, as is confirmed by the expression which follows: "And am not silent;" or, as in the margin, "there is no silence to me." This mode of speaking leads at once to the passages I have quoted respecting his prayers—his continuing in them all night—his doing so on mountains, and in solitary places—and of this being his usual custom. It ought likewise to be observed, that as the *second* verse of this psalm cannot be confined to the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, so neither can the *first*; for these two verses are evidently connected, and form one complaint. He had often, then, by night and by day, *thus* cried unto God, and had frequently expressed himself in the doleful language which he at last uttered *publicly* on Calvary. In the instance already mentioned, which is recorded in John xii. 27. there is the same state of anguish which is exhibited on the cross, though less in degree. The distress of his soul naturally excited a desire of deliverance, and he exclaimed, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" This marked the anguish of his heart, and throws light on the language which he immediately used—the meaning of which appears to be: "Shall I say, Father save me from this hour? No, for I came on purpose for this hour. I will say, Father, glorify thy name, cost me what it may. I ask not the salvation of sinners, at the expense of thy glory. Rather than thy character should be dishonoured, I bare my breast to the stroke of that sword which thou hast called to awake against me," John xii. 27, 28. Zech. xiii. 7. Thus did the Saviour *now* suffer, as well as afterwards, and thus did he manifest the spirit which influenced him to the last. This illustrates his complaint, that he had "been afflicted and ready to die from his youth up," Psalm xxxviii. 15. It accords with what David says as his type, "My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing," Psalm xxxi. 10; and shows the importance of such of the psalms as contain the substance of the prayers offered up by him on



earth. We are in these psalms brought, as it were, into his closet, are made the witnesses of his secret devotions, and are enabled to see even the inward workings of his heart. It is affecting thus to contemplate his feelings, and the exercise of his high and hallowed principles, in the presence of his Father.

The Scriptures, however, do certainly direct us in a particular manner, to the *last* scene of his work and of his woes; because it was the grand *completion* of his sufferings and undertakings in the room of sinners. The Evangelists have spoken fully of what he endured during the night on which he was betrayed. The seat of his sufferings at that time was his soul; for no human hand had as yet touched him. His body, it is true, was greatly affected, but this was occasioned by the distress and anguish of his mind. The heaviest bodily affliction is easily borne when the mind is at ease; for "the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Prov. xviii. 14. That therefore, which constituted the essence of his sufferings was of a mental kind. He was overwhelmed with *sorrow* of the most excruciating nature, which made him exclaim, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," Matt. xxvi. 38. Sorrow is the very essence of the curse denounced against sin, Gen. iii. 17. Matt. viii. 12. and he who was made "a curse for us," endured it to the utmost. The sorrows of death compassed him, and the pains of the invisible world got hold upon him," Psalm cxvi. 3. He felt as if besieged with sorrow; so that, to whatever quarter he turned, the bitter cup of anguish presented itself. His anguish was of so *deadly* a nature, that it threatened the dissolution of his frame even before he had reached the cross, and did at last *actually* cause his death.

We are also told that he was *sore amazed*.—This denotes a state of the utmost horror and consternation. We know that fear, when raised to the highest pitch, is a most tormenting passion. Often has nature entirely



sunk under it. But of all conditions, that of being in the hands of the living God, is the most fearful ; and in his hands the Saviour now was, Heb. x. 31. He is likewise represented as being *very heavy*, or in a state of the deepest dejection and depression of spirit, Mark xiv. 33. Now, though we cannot form a proper idea of the weight of his sufferings, we are sensible that deep horror, accompanied with poignant sorrow, and comfortless dejection, must be misery without mixture. Let us turn aside, and see this great sight—the *Son of God* in an *agony*. See him in this bitter conflict of nature, starting back, as overwhelmed with horror—struck with amazement and consternation—and encompassed with sorrow and anguish ! See him going backward and forward ; at one time kneeling, and at another falling prostrate on the ground ; seeking for comforters in his disciples, and piteously complaining, “ What ! could ye not watch with me one hour?—going again and again to his Father, and praying, Matt. xxvi. 40. with increasing intenseness of mind, that this bitter cup might for a time be withdrawn ! Consider the labours and the strivings of his thoughts ; the flaming passions and affections which rushed upon his mind at once ; and it will not be matter of wonder that he should have exclaimed, “ Save me, O God ; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in the deep mire, where there is no standing ; I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me ! ” Psalm lxix. 1, 2. His heart was preternaturally fired within him, so as to force a passage through the body for his rarefied blood ; for his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. The agony of his soul must have been bitter beyond conception, when such was its effect upon his body in the open air, at midnight, and when they who were within found it necessary to defend themselves against the cold. His firm heart was ready to break, and immediate death was threatened ; but knowing that much remained to be



accomplished, it was his prayer that the cup might for a time pass from him. His prayer was heard; an angel appeared to strengthen him; and he regained composure to act with propriety before his judges and the people, and to suffer what he endured before he reached the cross.\*

On the cross, the scene of Gethsemane was renewed—the cup was again presented to him, and there he drank it to the very dregs! On Calvary his distress reached its height, and drew from him the bitter exclamation, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Matth. xxvii. 46. Mysterious dereliction! only to be accounted for by the nature of his death. I may here remark, that the ordinary modes of execution are soon over; but not only was Jesus subjected to the sentence of the law during his whole life, that sentence was terminated by the slow mode of crucifixion; which lingering mode of death left his mental faculties at full liberty, and so best afforded an opportunity of displaying to the full the many glories of his character. His protracted sufferings on Calvary called forth the whole qualities of his heart, enabled him to show that he laid down his life of himself; and they diffused a sweet savour over his oblation. *Here* he could not manifest the deep and restless agitation of his heart by going to and fro, and changing his posture, as he did in the garden; but it was indicated by other circumstances. His *words* marked it, as did also his *countenance*. The sun was clothed with darkness; not only as an expression of the Divine displeasure against his foes, and a token of the awful darkness of his mind when under the frown of Heaven, but also as an expression of respect for the

\* See Doddridge on Luke xxii. 42. Our Lord did not pray to be entirely excused from sufferings and death. Such a petition had been inconsistent with that steady constancy he always showed, and with his language, in John xii. 27, 28. in which he disowns such a prayer. He speaks of the severity of the present combat which threatened dissolution, before the Scriptures, relative to his last sufferings, had been fulfilled.



sufferer, whose mental torture must at that time have "marred his visage more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men;" so that his countenance must have presented a spectacle more easily conceived than described. Over this scene a veil was thrown; yet it must have been in some degree apparent.\* How soothing, when we think of such sufferings, to consider his prayer for his murderers—his mercy to the malefactor by his side—his minute attention to the prophecies of Scripture—his care for his mother—and the solemn and devout manner in which he endured the inflictions of the heavenly Judge!

He at last expired under the curse, not so much in consequence of the exhaustion of nature by bodily pain and the loss of blood, (for in the article of death he cried with a loud voice, and Pilate marvelled when he heard of it,) as in consequence of the extreme pressure of mental torture, Matt. xxvii. 50. Mark xv. 44. This was too racking, too exquisite, for nature to support—it literally broke his heart. That sorrow which is the very soul of the curse, terminated his life; and thus discovered the nature of his sufferings, together with their great and glorious design.

It must be of the first importance to ascertain the causes of sufferings so great, and so deeply interesting to us. It cannot be that they arose merely from the fear of death. If, to a person so exalted and so distinguished, death *itself* had been so terrible, how dreadful would it be to us! Instead of having set us free from the fear of death, this king of terrors would have been rendered more formidable than ever. But, blessed be God, the death of the Redeemer was no *common* death; we need not, therefore, dread the last enemy. Many of the children of God, who have been naturally timid, and deeply sensible of their guilt and their weakness, have engaged in the last struggle with peaceful hearts,

\* See, in connection with this, such passages as Psalm xxii.\*6-8, 4-15.; lxi. 3, 9; cii. 3-5, 11. Isa. lii. 14.; liii. 3.



yea, with unutterable gladness, even when death appeared in its most painful and frightful forms. They have met the most cruel deadly tortures with fortitude, and have discovered no dread or dejection ; but, on the contrary, the most placid tranquillity, and even the highest emotions of joy. Whence the difference between the *Master*, who is all dejection and consternation, even to such a degree as to affect his body in the most extraordinary manner, and the *servant*, who, in the prospect of martyrdom, exults in the hope of the “ crown of righteousness ?” 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8. The difference is to be found in *this*—that Christ died as a *sacrifice* for sin, and in the *peculiar nature* and *measure* of the sufferings which were necessary to that sacrifice. Whether we consider the state of destitution to which he was reduced, or what he endured from positive infliction, we cannot but see that his sufferings were as unparalleled as was the character which he sustained. He bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that he might redeem us from the curse of the law and the power of death ; that, dying under the weight of the Divine displeasure, we might be blessed in life, at death, and throughout eternity. Thus the curse is exhausted, and the cup put into our hands has nothing of wrath in it, but is entirely medicinal, even in its most bitter ingredients, Rom. viii. 35–39. 1 Cor. iii. 21–23.

It is evident, my dear friend, that the sufferings of Christ arose from the hand of his Father, in the character of Judge and Lawgiver, Isaiah liii. 6. Zech. xiii. 7. As such, it became him to express his displeasure against sin ; that, while mercy triumphed, it might not be at the expense of justice, or of the general good. He loved the guilty, and would have had no difficulty in saving them without an atonement, had this been consistent with righteousness, with the glory of his character, the honour of the law, the good of the universe and of the guilty themselves. Christ did not purchase the love of God ; his death is the *fruit*, and not the *price* of it. It opened a channel through which



the love of God flows to the guilty, in a way at once honourable to him and beneficial to them. There is nothing here bordering on rigour or cruelty ; but a sacred regard to rectitude and the Divine law, united with the warmest benevolence towards sinners. The Saviour, *personally* considered, was never the object of the Divine displeasure. Even when the hand of God was most heavily upon him, he was the object of Divine delight ; and, confident of this, he said, " Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep," John x. 17. But, considered as the representative of sinners, it behoved him to suffer the dismal consequences of the divine displeasure against their rebellion, so that he must have felt that he suffered the effects of the Divine indignation.

One great cause of the sufferings of Christ, was the clear perception which he had of the sins of his people, in all their odiousness and malignity. His holy mind was deeply affected by the evil and hatefulness of rebellion against God. Well did he know the high and righteous claims of God on the love and the obedience of all ; and the violated obligations of man, with the tendency and awful effects of sin, were fully before him. *Our* feelings in regard to sin are blunted by the slightness of our views of guilt ; but he had the clearest perceptions of the evil and demerit of transgression, and he hated it with his whole heart. The more dearly he loved his people, the more would his trouble be increased ; as we are much more affected by the crimes of a relative or friend, than by the crimes of others, Psalm xl. 12. Such a view of the evil and hateful nature of sin must have been inconceivably painful to the Saviour, when it was not counterbalanced by an equally clear view of good, which during his last sufferings he had not ; because at that time he was left to distress unmingled with gladness.

In this hour of anguish he had a deep sense of the Divine wrath against sin. Though he was *personally* the object of the Divine love, he endured that which,



to the guilty, is the awful expression of the Divine displeasure. The God of our spirits can easily deluge the soul with sorrow and anguish, even when the spirit is pure, and is the object of his approbation. In such a case, the painful feelings cannot be those of a guilty conscience; and, in the case of our Lord, there could be nothing of this kind. It is utterly wrong to represent his sufferings, as in all respects the same with those of the impenitent in the world of woe. They eat of the fruit of their own ways—they are under the dominion of the most sinful propensities—their ungovernable passions are for ever excited, and never find gratification—they have no self-respect, but are conscious of personal guilt, and filled with remorse—and their final despair is accompanied with every furious and malignant principle, and with settled hostility to the character and government of God. Nothing of this nature could have place in the breast of the Saviour. He knew and he confessed, the sinfulness and demerit of man. He acquitted the throne of God, and laid the undivided blame on the sinner. Even when he exclaimed, in the bitterness of his soul, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” he murmured not, but said, “Thou art holy,” Psalm xxii. 3. When his heart was broken, and his spirit distracted with agonies passing comprehension, he bowed with profound and cheerful submission to the hand of God, and with perfect resignation drank the whole of the bitter cup. It were equally wrong, on the other hand, to infer, from the difference between his sufferings and those of the finally condemned, that his woes were not of the most intense kind. That difference arises from the opposite *characters* of the parties. Where no difference of *character* exists, there must be a similarity of suffering or enjoyment. We are apt to connect future punishment with *place*, to such a degree, as to suppose that the former cannot be endured but in a particular local situation; but place is only a *circumstance*, not at all affecting the *essence* of punishment. In as far as Jesus could feel it, he endured the wrath of



God due to sin. He was in the hands of the living God, who has access into the innermost recesses of the heart, and can excite a degree of sensibility far exceeding in intenseness what the mind of man can possibly conceive. He had the most awful views of God, as the author and the vindicator of the law—as armed with all that judgment which is included in the curse of the Almighty—as in the act of executing the most tremendous threatenings of his word—and as called upon, in his public character, to inflict on the surety of sinners the full desert of their atrocious rebellion. It was not death in *itself* from which he suffered so much ; but death as penal, or as the wages of sin. He contemplated God in the character of the offended Judge ; and, under a sense of his anger against sin, he was filled with dread. His outward sufferings were nothing to the distresses of his soul ; of the former we find him, accordingly, speaking with the greatest composure, Matth. xx. 17—19. while the latter called forth the most bitter exclamations and the most intense supplications, Heb. v. 7. Matth. xxvi. 36—42. Mark xv. 34.

Another ingredient in his cup was the desertion of his Father : of this he speaks in the most plaintive manner, Psalm xxii. 1. ; lxxxviii. 14. Separation from God is a part of the curse : hence Adam was expelled Eden ; and hence, too, the wicked shall be doomed to depart from the presence of Him in whose favour is life, Matth. xxv. 41. 2 Thess. i. 9. Psalm lxix. 3, 17. This may be thought light here, but in the other world it causes inexpressible misery. As it forms an essential part of the curse due to sin, it behoved our Lord to experience it when he stood for the guilty. This, however, is a subject awfully mysterious, and on which little can be said. He felt himself given up to the will of his enemies, and to all that sin deserved, without one cheering ray of his Father's countenance to mitigate his distress. This was the summit, the bitterest ingredient of his sufferings. If life lies in the favour of God, and his frown be destructive of the bliss of a spiritual



being, the sufferings of the Redeemer must have been inconceivably great when the frown of Jehovah fell upon him. The bitter lamentations which this extorted from him discover the feelings of his heart. Although he was kept from utterly sinking, there were seasons when he endured the total absence of Divine joy, and the entire want of every kind of comfort. Not that his mind was *always* in this state, even in the deepest of his trials; but this was, on such occasions, and particularly in the last scenes of his suffering, the *general* state of his soul. To him the sun of consolation was then totally eclipsed. Our depravity, and the weakness of our powers, hinder us from forming adequate ideas of his distress, when deprived of the light of his Father's countenance, and doomed to suffer his frown. This is the deepest misery which man can feel, and misery of which the Redeemer must have been most painfully sensible, in consequence of his situation, the greatness of his powers, and the holiness of his character. No evil principle obscured his view of the Divine glory—no sinful bias kept him from perceiving, in the most vivid light, the worth of the Divine favour—and nothing could cool his love to Jehovah, or turn away his heart from him. The more he loved God, the clearer views he had of his glory; and the more that he delighted in fellowship with him, the greater must have been his sorrow and anguish of heart when the Father hid his face from him. His aversion to this was the language of nature, which must ever be averse to pain; but it was much more: it was also the fruit of piety; as the more he was devoted to God, the greater must have been his aversion to that which cut him off from the enjoyment of him, Psalm xvi. 5—11. The more, too, that he was averse to the cup on *such* principles, the more glorious does his drinking of it appear, that the Divine law, character, and government, might be honoured, and the salvation of sinners thus completely secured. The reluctance of our Lord to the cup, and the distress of his soul when drinking of it, show the strength of his love



both to God and man, and admirably manifest the perfection of his character, Psalm xl. 7, 8. His sufferings afforded an opportunity for the exercise and display of all that is great and good—of all that can command the highest veneration, the warmest love, and the most heartfelt gratitude.

To prefigure our Lord's endurance of that separation from God, which is an essential part of the curse, the most remarkable of the sin-offerings were burnt without the camp. As polluted victims, they were removed from the place where God dwelt. In like manner, Jesus suffered without the gate of the holy city, because he was in the eye of the law an unclean victim, Heb. xiii. 11, 12. This was but an indication of his *actual* state, as separated from the enjoyment of fellowship with God. He died in an unclean place, where the bones of many of the dead, and these of the worst character too, lay all around: every thing in the *place*, as well as in the *manner* of his death, marking him out as dying under the frown of Heaven, and in a state of exclusion from the holy sanctuary of Jehovah. From this sanctuary every thing unclean was excluded under the law; and, in allusion to this, our Lord speaks of his sufferings as a pollution, and in this light they were viewed by the Jews, Psalm xxii. 6, 7. Every one saw that our Lord's sufferings were of no common character. The circumstances attending his bodily sufferings were unprecedented, and their effects upon his mind were remarkable; while, on the other hand, the effects of his mental torture upon his body were still more striking. Psalm cix. 22—25. and lxi. 11—21. Much must have been visible which was calculated to offend those who could look only to the outward appearance, and to give occasion to his enemies to triumph over him. While the people of God, when they cried unto him, had been heard and delivered, his prayers were not heard in the same way; because he suffered for the guilty in a state of seclusion from the habitation and favour of God. He was treated as a leper, whose la-



mentations, instead of meeting with condolence, could only be made in a state of excommunication, Lev. xiii. 45. with Num. v. 1—3. and whose malady was viewed as resulting from the immediate visitation of God. The people treated him thus ; because they could not account for his unparalleled sufferings in any other way than that of his being an unparalleled sinner ; and he himself acted as one unclean in the eye of the law, because he had devoted himself to be a sacrifice for sin, Isaiah liii. 3—5. The higher our views are of the perfect purity and holiness of his character, the more deeply impressive will be our views of his condition when separated from all delightful fellowship with God, and treated as a polluted victim. This was prefigured under the law by the animals offered in sacrifice, which were to be the purest and most perfect in themselves, while, in consequence of being substituted in the room of the guilty, they were treated as unclean. From all this legal impurity was our Lord delivered by his expiatory death.

Connected with this was the *shame* to which he was subjected. Shame forms a part of the curse due to sin, Dan. xii. 2. Isaiah lxvi. 24. This arises from the nature of sin, which includes in it the contempt of excellence, and opposition to all that is good—the perverse abuse of the faculties of the mind ; of the bounties of Providence and the ways of God—which involves in it the most wicked rebellion and the basest ingratitude ; and which manifests the government of the most despicable and hateful propensity. A principle inducing such a character and conduct, must merit the most decided reprobation and the most marked contempt. The conviction that this contempt is deserved, must torment the condemned in that world where the clearest light shall be united with the most deep-rooted hostility to all that is good. The Saviour, having appeared in the cause of sinners, was exposed to the keenest reproach and the most galling shame. We ought not to look upon this as a slight part of his woes ; for shame is a



most painful emotion, which has driven many from the haunts of men, and to offer violence to nature itself. The Redeemer often speaks of the shame and the scorn he endured, and says that "reproach had broken his heart," Psalm lxix. 19, 20. These bitter consequences and effects of sin account for the *manner* of our Lord's death, Gal. iii. 13. It was necessary not only that he should die, but that he should die in circumstances shameful and degrading: He accordingly died the death of the cross, *that* being the most shameful death then among men, Heb. xii. 2. Phil. ii. 8. He indeed knew that he merited not reproach, but praise; but his circumstances of shame and contempt forcibly impressed him with the baseness and malignity of sin, and the unworthiness of those for whom he suffered.

It is of importance to observe, farther, that our Lord's sufferings were increased by the assaults of the powers of darkness, John xiv. 30. The serpent bruised his heel, as had been early foretold, Gen. iii. 15. There are times when the mind is in a situation very susceptible of trouble and anguish; and this was the case with the Saviour, when the prince of darkness attacked him. Every fresh calamity laid his mind more open to pain from another; and at this time calamity came after calamity, and deluged his soul with the most bitter and complicated distress. No wonder, then, that he was filled with a shocking mixture of terror and amazement—of dejection and sorrow.

I may add, that a number of inferior causes contributed to increase his sufferings. All the evils which sin hath introduced seemed to conspire against him. While his soul was overwhelmed with bitter sorrow, and his body racked with the tortures of the cross, he had to endure the mockery of the Jews—the conduct of his own disciples, and numerous other circumstances of the most painful nature, Psal. xxii. 6—18. lxix. 7—12, 19—21. Isaiah l. 6: liii. All of these, however, the Redeemer traced to God, as well as what came *immediately* from him. When apprehended by the offi-



cers sent to take him, he said, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" John xviii. 11. The things which led to his death, as well as the death itself, he considered as the effects of the Divine wrath against sin; and, viewing them in *this* light, he must have had the bitterness of his cup exceedingly increased. It is this view of the many events and circumstances in the death of the Redeemer which makes them illustrative of the nature and the causes of his sufferings, and leads us to perceive the glory of his character.

Thus did the Son of God endure the curse of the Divine law, in suffering that sorrow, dejection, and consternation—that shame and degradation, which marked his career. He suffered under the frown of the Law-giver and the Judge of all; and that in such circumstances, that in the prime of life *he died of a wounded spirit*. In his death, doubtless, he voluntarily yielded up his life; but this appeared in his voluntarily submitting to be cut off by means of the awful and deadly pressure of the curse upon his soul, and not merely by a direct act of his own, without the intervention of means. Thus sin was expiated—the Divine law magnified and made honourable—the character of God vindicated and fully displayed, and the salvation of the guilty completely secured. "It is finished!" said the wondrous sufferer. Resigning himself into the hands of his God, he exclaimed, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" and "bowing his head, he gave up the ghost," John xix. 30. Luke xxiii. 46. Thus died he; at once as a sacrifice for sin, and as "the Prince of life." Let the philanthropy of God our Saviour expand our minds and enlarge our hearts. Into his views let us enter, his character let us imitate, and thus his bliss we shall ultimately possess.

Praying that he who knows all our afflictions, and hath taken their bitterness away, may be with you and bless you,

I remain, my dear Friend, yours, &c.



## LETTER II.

## ON THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

General remarks on the glory of Christ, as illustrated by his sufferings. His glory a striking manifestation of the Divine character—Appears in his resurrection—In his ascension—The completion of the atonement—The Divine approbation of his work—And his ministrations and bliss in the heavenly sanctuary. Was the subject of his prayer and conversation on earth—Demonstrates the perfection of his sacrifice—Is the source of peace before God—of sanctification—of consolation under affliction, and in the prospect of death and eternity.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING, in my last letter, made some observations on the sufferings of Christ, I shall now direct your attention to the glory which followed. These two subjects mutually illustrate each other, and they formed the great topics of prophetic teaching, 1 Pet. i. 11. That we may understand the true nature of the glory of the Saviour, it is necessary to advert again to the character in which he viewed God in the time of his sufferings. He then contemplated him chiefly as the Lawgiver and the Judge of all, highly displeased with the violation of his authority, and as in the act of executing the sentence of the law. He viewed death as the wages of sin, and as the infliction of the curse of Jehovah. The wrath of God, as revealed in the cross of Christ, gives the most awful display of Divine justice; and in the death of the Redeemer, we receive the deepest impressions of the moral character of God. Here we are taught, by irresistible evidence, that life lies in the Divine favour, and that the frown of Heaven is the very essence of death. In the mortal agonies of Him who expired under the frown of the God of all blessedness, we see the lowest degradation to which human nature can be brought, and the deepest misery to which man can be subjected, as the fruit of sin.

In the resurrection of Christ there is also a wonderful



manifestation of the Divine character. The power displayed in it is not merely physical, like that which was manifested in the resurrection of those whom our Lord brought from the dead in the days of his flesh. Hence Paul, in his prayer for the Ephesians, labours for words to express the amazing grandeur of that power which was exerted in the Redeemer's deliverance from death, Ephes. i. 18—23. He terms it “the *exceeding greatness* of the power of God,” and “the *working of his mighty power*.” He also leads our attention beyond the resurrection of the Saviour, to the glory bestowed on him in his exaltation to the right hand of God, to the government of the church, and thus of all things for its sake. In raising and glorifying Christ, God must be viewed, not so much as Almighty, but rather as the Lawgiver and the Judge of all, raising and glorifying the Surety of sinners, in consistency with, and infinitely to the honour of, his law and government. The Moral Governor was enabled to act in this manner in consequence of the infinite worth of the sacrifice of Christ, which satisfied all the claims of justice, and fully vindicated and illustrated the character of Jehovah.

But while the unutterable value of the death of Christ is that from which his reward arose, its worth does not spring from suffering simply, but from the excellence of the principles and views which animated the illustrious sufferer, Psalm xlv. 6, 7. Heb. i. 8, 9. Hence God, while exercising this power in rewarding Christ, was not only doing what in his public character he had a right to do, or what he could do, in full consistency with the demands of law and justice; but was at the same time expressing the strength of his love to the character of the Redeemer, and the ineffable complacency with which he rests in his work, Psalm xviii. 19, 20. Isaiah xlii. 1. The meaning of the prayer I refer to appears to be this,—“That the eyes of the mind being freed from error and sin, Christians may clearly discern and rightly judge of the great object of hope to which they have been called out of the world,



and of the riches and grandeur of that lot, or place given them among the saints, as citizens of the heavenly city ; and apprehend aright the grandeur of the power of God manifested in the behalf, or on account, of his people ; that is, the energy of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and glorified him in heaven.”\*

The subject spoken of is not the power exerted in leading us to believe the Gospel, which is doubtless the energy of the Spirit of God ; but the power exerted in our behalf, when the Father raised the Redeemer, and gave him glory as our public Head. The power here displayed is that of raising and glorifying the very Person who had died under the curse and by means of the frown of the Lawgiver, Heb. xiii. 20. In distinction from that which is merely physical, it may be termed moral power, as expressive of a right in law. Had not the death of the Surety expiated sin, and glorified the Divine law—had it not vindicated and illustrated the Divine character—and had it not opened a channel through which mercy might flow to sinners, in consistency with justice, and highly to its glory—in that case the Judge could not legally have released him, Rom. iv. 25. and vi. 7—10. But such is the value of the Redeemer’s work, and such the glory of his character, that the Moral Governor, under whose awful frown he had died, could with infinite propriety, deliver him from that very death which he had inflicted as the curse of his violated law. In the death of Christ we have an *awful* display of the power of God in punishing sin ; in his resurrection a *delightful* exhibition of his power in rewarding righteousness. In the cross of the Saviour, we see his soul wounded, and that by the hand of God ;

\* Ephesians ii. 19.—The apostle is speaking, not of the correspondence between the power, exerted in the resurrection of Christ, and that exerted in causing us to believe, but of the object of faith—namely the display of the Divine character in raising him on our behalf. This does not derogate from the power displayed in the conversion of sinners, for the latter is of a different kind, and of a higher order, than the physical power exerted in the resurrection of Jesus



but in his resurrection and glorification, we see the same God healing his wounded spirit, and gladdening his heart, Deut. xxxii. 39, 40. That soul which was surrounded with bitter and deadly sorrows, is now made exceeding glad with the light of God's countenance. He who was sunk into the deepest wretchedness, is now inheriting blessedness beyond—infinity beyond—our most exalted conceptions. The fulness of the Divine delight now rests upon Him, who, as a victim, polluted and accursed in the eye of the law, suffered without the gates of the city. He who once was excluded the presence and the house of God, is now in the heavenly holy place, and at the right hand of the Majesty on high. How delightful to turn from that preternatural darkness which covered him on Calvary, and which was so expressive of the Divine displeasure against sin,—to his resurrection and his glory, as the most expressive signs of the Divine complacency in his finished righteousness ! How cheering to contrast his misery on earth with his bliss in heaven—the gloom of Gethsemane and the cross, with the meridian sunshine which now encompasses him on Mount Zion—his bitter and heart-rending exclamations in the house of mourning, with his songs of praise in that temple, where the glory of God, as his God and Father, for ever rests. But so opposed to the natural principles of the human heart, is the view, thus given in the resurrection of Christ of the character of God and the condition of man, that nothing short of the invincible power of Him who raised him from the dead, will ever bring a sinner to receive it. And it is in his being brought to receive the love of this revelation, that the quickening influence of the Spirit of God upon his heart is made manifest.

In considering the glory of Christ, it is necessary to contemplate his ascension into heaven, and the station he there fills. He entered the heavenly holy place as a triumphant conqueror, having overcome Satan, and sin, and death, Psalm xxiv. 7-10. He ascended amidst the loud and joyful acclamations of the heavenly hosts,



Psalm lxxviii. 17, 18. He entered the temple in the character of the High Priest with his own blood, and solemnly offered it unto God, Heb. ix. 11, 12. The character which he had displayed in his sufferings upon earth, and which his manifold woes had served to illustrate, must have given the greatest weight to what he solemnly declared by his sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. He there afresh exhibited the collected excellencies which he had manifested on the cross. In the midst of the invisible hosts he vindicated the injured character of God : declared his law to be holy, and just, and good ; condemned sin as exceeding sinful, and laid its undivided blame upon man. The solemn declaration of such a personage, who was so fully competent in every respect to judge in the case—and who, moreover, had suffered unto death—must have produced the most powerful impressions on the whole of the heavenly worshippers. Thus did he complete the atonement, and thus did he inspire all around, whether angels or redeemed sinners, with the highest reverence and love for the character of God, the deepest abhorrence of sin, and the most sacred regard to righteousness.

Having finished this part of his undertaking, God called him to his right hand ; set him on the throne of David, as the king of the spiritual Israel ; and invested him with the government of all worlds, for the sake of his church, Psalm cx. 1. Isaiah ix. 6, 7. By this exaltation, Jehovah gave the brightest display of that infinite complacency with which he viewed the high and hallowed character of the Mediator, and of the delight he felt on seeing the redemption of sinners secured in a way so honourable to him, and so suited to them. The songs of angels, and of redeemed sinners, in which the Lamb is declared to be worthy of “ all blessing, and honour, and glory, and riches,” are but an echo of the language of the Father, when he seated him as a Priest upon his throne, and called all orders of creatures to worship and serve him. He delighted in so glorious a demonstration of his holiness—such security for the ends



and honour of his government—such a display of his manifold wisdom and of the riches of his grace—and such a proof and illustration of the full harmony of his perfections, as were furnished by the sufferings and reward of his Son. Must it not, then, be a part, and a great part, of the glory of the Saviour, to be thus acknowledged as worthy of all honour and blessedness by Him who is the best judge of genuine merit?

In heaven the Redeemer appears as the first-born of the family of God, and exhibits in himself that glory to which his redeemed are destined to be conformed. His body is spiritual, glorious, vigorous, and incorruptible, and completely adapted to his exalted station as Lord of all. His spirit is filled with unutterable blessedness in the enjoyment of the divine love. He is happy in a constant sense of the divine complacency in his obedience and death, and in his official administration in the heavenly temple. In this temple he sits as Lord, having the whole charge of its sacred services. There he leads the song, intercedes for his people, presents and procures the acceptance of their services, and communicates all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. There he exhibits to the whole of the heavenly hosts the full effulgence of the divine perfections. In this delightful abode, his redeemed cleave to him with the utmost ardour of love, contemplate his personal and official glory with exquisite delight, and ever triumph in him with the highest exultation. He is blessed in seeing them blessed, and delights in communicating to them fresh enjoyments, and causing them to participate in all his manifold and exalted joys. He exults as he surveys and forwards his work of salvation. This work he considers his highest glory, John xii. 28, 24. All his external grandeur is viewed by him as subordinate and subservient to his mediatorial character. In a word, the noble—the divine—feelings, which animated him when, for the sake of removing misery, and imparting happiness, he bled, and groaned, and died, are in heaven completely gratified.



Thus he sees the travail of his soul, and is satisfied, Isaiah liii. 11.

The deep interest taken by the Saviour in the glory promised him, appears in the prayers which he poured out unto God for deliverance from the power of death, and for that life which is now given. In Psalm xxi. we read of the request of his lips, and the desire of his heart, as occupied with the blessings of the divine goodness,—with the crown of glory which he now wears,—with his everlasting life as Mediator,—with his being constituted the medium of blessings to many, and with the enjoyment of the light of his Father's countenance. In Psalm xxii. he fervently prays for deliverance; and he intimates, that, upon his request being granted, he should declare the character of God to his brethren, in the midst of the general assembly and church of the first born. He himself blesses God for hearing his prayers, and calls upon the people to join in the delightful exercise of praising *Him* who had not despised the affliction of the afflicted One, but had granted him the desire of his heart. He also exults in the prospect of all the ends of the earth being blessed with his salvation, and made to rejoice in the benefits of his sacrifice. Similar are his prayers and thanksgivings in Psalm lxix. cxvi. cxviii., in which he declares his sufferings, expresses his gratitude to God, and his assured confidence that he should ultimately triumph in the full and final salvation of his people.

The interest he took in his future glory appears in the frequent references he made to it when conversing with his disciples, and in his public discourses. We cannot read his history without seeing that eternity was ever before him; that he longed for the time when the Gospel should be preached to all nations; when the way into the holiest of all should be laid open; and when he, in his high character, as a priest upon his throne, should unfold what "eye had not seen, what ear had not heard, and what never could have entered the mind of man or of angel." 1 Cor. ii. 9. With these views he endea-



voured to comfort his disciples on the night on which he was betrayed. Hence he dwelt on the blessed consequences of his entrance into heaven, as they respected the glory of God, his own glory, and the cause of truth and salvation among men.

Surely, then, it becomes us to take up all these views. If his resurrection declares him to be indeed the Son of God, Romans i. 4 ;—if it proves the perfection of his sacrifice, 1 Cor. xv. 17, 20 ; Romans iv. 25 ;—if the glory of God is made manifest by it, Phil. ii. 9–11 ; it must be at once our duty and our privilege to place unsuspecting confidence in his finished work, 1 Pet. i. 21. If these important truths are still farther demonstrated by his exaltation and glory in the heavenly sanctuary, then all that could be done to satisfy us *has* been fully accomplished. I need not say that nothing can pacify conscience, upon solid grounds, but that which satisfied the justice of Heaven ; and hence the preciousness of that Gospel which demonstrates that Divine justice is satisfied, perfectly, and for ever. How animating it is to see the Almighty illustrate by facts what he proclaimed from the excellent glory, when he said, “ This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased,” Matth. xvii. 5. Here he is revealed in the endearing character of the “ God of Peace,” and from this view of his character springs the hope of the guilty.

It is in connection with this revelation that he calls upon sinners to come to him through Christ, and promises pardon and eternal life to all who believe his testimony, and who (if I may be allowed the expression) take him at his word, and venture their eternity upon it. It is the knowledge of these spiritual things that quickens the dead in trespasses and sins. It brings them into a state of holy fellowship with the Saviour, with whom all who believe are raised and made partakers of a new life, Ephes. ii. 4–7. Now, the sinner can allow his conscience to depict the true character of his heart and his sinful ways—he can admit, without palliation, all that it can say of the number and aggravations



of his crimes ; because, however heavy and odious its charges may be, the resurrection and glory of Christ, as by public adjudication, set before him a righteousness already perfectly finished, and honourably rewarded, 1 Tim. i. 13—16. In the Divine testimony concerning his work and elevation, is concentrated the very essence of “ the word of reconciliation,” 2 Cor. v. 18, 19 ; Acts xiii. 32—37. Here every perplexing question as to the ground of acceptance is answered in a way which at once gives rest to the trembling conscience, and produces godly sorrow and deep contrition.

The contemplation of the divine character, as thus manifested in the glory of Christ, has the most powerful influence in sanctifying the soul. When we think of the principles, the qualities, and the deeds, which adorned the character of our Lord when suffering for sin, and view the divine delight in them, displayed in his exaltation, we see what that character is, which calls forth the approbation of Heaven, and conformity to which is essential to happiness. While we find peace in the blood of the cross, we are attracted towards God, and our affections captivated, by the excellencies unfolded in the means of our deliverance. Thus the corruption of the heart receives a mortal stroke—we are delivered from worldly lusts—the mind is elevated above every groveling and ensnaring attachment—and the character is made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Such is the influence of the Gospel of peace. Having found mercy through faith in the blood of Christ, the love of God is implanted, a filial dread of his displeasure is felt, and an ardent desire of deliverance from sin, and of the divine approbation, is produced. We are thus led to inquire, What shall I render to the Lord for his manifold blessings ? how shall I express my gratitude, and give vent to my love, and become the object of the complacency of my God and Father ? In answer to such inquiries we are directed to the wondrous excellencies of the character of *Christ*, and are taught that *such* are the principles, dispositions, and deportment, in which God



delights; and in proof of which we are referred to the exaltation and the grandeur of the Redeemer as the reward of his work, Phil. ii. 5—13. This leads our mind to heaven, and to the glory of the Saviour there; and excites us to study conformity to his spirit and behaviour, as the great pattern of all that is excellent. There is every thing in this high example to call forth our devoutest affection and constant imitation. *Who* is he whose character has thus been honoured of God, and in whom he rests with such delightful satisfaction? Is he not our own Friend, Deliverer, and Brother? *What* called forth the qualities and excellencies thus applauded of Heaven? what exercised them? what brightened and increased their positive glory? Was it not his sufferings *for us*? *What are* the principles thus gloriously rewarded? Are they not the principles which moved him to undertake *our* cause, and to continue his career of free, generous, and disinterested love in *our behalf*, till he could say, “It is finished?” Must we not seek them in that union of mercy and truth, of righteousness and peace, which is displayed in his whole character, and which is the glory of his salvation? Yes; we see them in that love to God and zeal for his glory, which moved him to the firm determination, that, rather than our redemption should be at the expense of the Divine justice, he would bare his breast to the sword of Heaven, and encounter all its terrors. We see them in that love to men which moved him to veil his glory, to stoop to shame, wretchedness, and death, that he might redeem the guilty and unworthy from merited misery and wrath. We see them in his profound veneration for justice and integrity, united with the most tender compassion for sinners, and unbounded goodness towards them. We see them in his meek resignation to the will of God, his cheerful submission to his appointments, and his patient endurance of all that the Judge saw meet to inflict, united with unquenchable love and zeal, continually burning in the cause of the lost and the unworthy children of men. In a word, we see them in the collected



and wondrous excellencies which shone in their highest glory, when, in his obedience unto death, he displayed the character of God as at once just and merciful in perfection. Surely, then, excellencies which were manifested in our *own behalf*, and for our eternal deliverance from evil, and our everlasting enjoyment of all good, must command our gratitude and admiration. The sight of that glory which marks the ineffable delight of the Father in *these* principles must convince us of the strength of his *own* love towards us, and of the exceeding riches of his grace.

The consideration of the design of the Redeemer's glory is calculated to produce the same result. Has he been raised from the dead? It is as the first fruits of them that slept; so that his resurrection is the pledge of ours. If we think of his glorified body, we know that it is the pattern after which these vile bodies shall one day be fashioned, Phil. iii. 21. If we follow him in his ascent to heaven, and hear the call to admit him as "the Lord, mighty in battle," we see him as the Conqueror of *our* foes, and as the Captain of *our* salvation, Psalm xxiv. 7—10, and lxviii. 18. If we view him as the High Priest entering within the veil, we know that he entered as our forerunner, and that he there offered himself, and completed his expiatory work in our behalf, Heb. vi. 20. and ix. 11, 12, 21—26. If we look to him when seated as a priest upon his throne, we remember that he hath "made us kings and priests unto God, even his Father;" Rev. v. 9, 10; that he is there as the builder of the temple of the Lord, and that as such he will bear the glory; Zech. vi. 13; that he still intercedes for us; and that he is ever employed in watching over *our* interests, and securing *our* safety and *our* bliss. Heb. vii. 25; Rom. v. 9, 10. If we look to him as Lord of all worlds, we know that all things are overruled for our good. If we dwell upon his blessedness, we see it arising from the enjoyment of the delightful complacency of Jehovah in his work for us; and from beholding the blessed fruits of it in our redemption



and our blessedness. If we think of his second coming and his glory then to be revealed, we remember that he comes to complete our salvation, and to consummate our happiness.

What an attraction is there in the glory of our Head to draw the heart to heaven ! How sweet and satisfying to look into the holiest of all, and there to contemplate his majesty and his goodness—the grandeur of his presence, and the beauties of his character, together with his official ministrations, and the constant and rich communications of his grace ! How soothing and animating to behold the countless hosts of the redeemed receiving the liberal diffusions of his unrestrained bounty, drinking at the fountain-head of all blessedness, and as so many mirrors reflecting the lustre of his glorious excellencies ? To see his saints around him, sparkling forth their borrowed glory to his eternal praise, must inflame the heart with love the most ardent, and fill it with bliss the most sublime and transporting. The hope of this glory must purify the soul ; for it is the hope of seeing the Redeemer as he is, and of being completely like to him. It is the hope of participating in those pure and spiritual pleasures which are at the right hand of God, and in that fulness of divine joy which is in his high presence ; and it is the hope of uniting with the heavenly High Priest, and all the heavenly family, in the exalted and hallowed exercises of the heavenly temple. This is not the hope of contemplating mere abstract excellence, but of beholding and enjoying glory most interesting to ourselves. Hence Christians are exhorted, as persons risen with Christ, to seek the things which are in heaven, and to set their affections on the glorious objects which are exhibited where he sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty on high, Col. iii. 1—4. That superiority to the world which is essential to genuine religion, springs from faith in the glory of Him who hath abolished death, and hath brought light and incorruption to light by the Gospel. Shall we have such a Head and Representative, seated



on such a throne, and engaged in such ministrations for us, and shall we not set our affections on that world

“ Where our best friends and brethren dwell,  
Where God our Saviour reigns ?”

This great object of hope is the source of consolation and support amidst the many and heavy afflictions of life. In the day of adversity the ancient worthies, and the apostles of Christ, comforted themselves by remembering, that he who raised up, and glorified the Saviour, would also raise up and glorify them. The resurrection of Christ hath begotten us to the lively hope of an inheritance beyond the grave ; and this animates with joy unutterable and full of glory, even in the midst of manifold trials, 1 Pet. i. 3—6. When we look within the veil, how poor, insignificant, and unsatisfactory, do the enjoyments of time appear ! how slight and inconsiderable do we feel our troubles, when we look to the things which are unseen and eternal ! Rom. viii. 17, 18. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. Every successive view of these realities delights, elevates, and purifies the spirit. The heart, while it dwells on them, is overcome by a sense of their grandeur, and satisfied by the conviction of their unspeakable worth. The mind is thus calmed. Meek resignation, and patient submission to the chastening hand of the Father of mercies, are cherished, in the full confidence that all is in love, and that the light and momentary afflictions of this state are working out a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.

These considerations alleviate our grief when bereaved of Christian relatives and friends. In such circumstances we are reminded, that, as Jesus died and rose again, so they who sleep in him shall God bring with him ; that the Lord shall come from heaven, shall redeem his people from the grave, and take them to be for ever with himself. The Christian is enabled to look forward to the day of Christ as that on which his reunion with his departed friends shall be completed, never more to be dissolved. He is thus enabled to anticipate his own dissolution, with peace, and hope, and



joy. Looking to him who hath died and risen again, he rejoices that he hath overcome death, and that thus it is now a messenger of peace. Jesus died and rose again, that his people might be able to say, "All things are ours, whether life or death;" so that "neither death nor life, things present nor things to come, shall ever separate from the love of Christ, nor from the love of God manifested through him, 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22. Rom. viii. 35—39. Contemplating the Redeemer, we anticipate the resurrection-morn, when, standing on the brink of the grave, from which we have just been delivered, we shall exclaim with triumphant rapture, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Then, my dear friend, our sun shall no more go down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended. I am, &c.

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### LETTER III.

#### ON THE INVITATIONS AND PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL.

The importance of understanding the invitations and promises of the Gospel.—The former addressed to men considered as sinners, the latter respect them as believers.—Self-examination not designed to find a warrant to go to Christ.—This illustrated by a reference to the manna, the cities of refuge, and the brazen serpent.—The happy effects of the knowledge of the truth.—The study of the character of Christ necessary to our sanctification.—The great object of faith should be steadily contemplated.—General reflections.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It is of great importance to understand the invitations and promises of the Gospel, in order to our perceiving that it is the only source of relief and comfort to a guilty



creature. The message of reconciliation finds us in a state of condemnation and sin. In this state its blessed light rises upon us, and shining forth in all its glory, reveals the righteousness and salvation of Christ as at hand. It invites the guilty to come to the Saviour, and promises the many and precious blessings of redemption to every sinner who believes the testimony of Heaven respecting his atonement. Those who are invited are not a particular class of persons, distinguished by certain excellencies or qualifications, but all mankind. They are described only by those necessitous and wretched circumstances which are common to men. The "weary and the heavy laden," "the hungry and the thirsty," are sinners considered simply as miserable and as longing for happiness. They are addressed, not as sensible sinners, or as hungering and thirsting after Christ and spiritual blessings, but as "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not," Isaiah lv. 1—3. To such, in all their guilt, are the invitations of the Gospel given, and the promises of mercy and eternal life are made to them, considered *as coming* to the Saviour.

The invitations of the Gospel are addressed to all—the promises respect believers only. There is a sense, indeed, in which the promises also are addressed to sinners. They are invited to come to Christ, and are promised rest if they comply with his gracious call, Matth. xi. 28. The wicked and the unrighteous are called to forsake their ways and their thoughts, and to return unto the Lord, by obeying his counsel; to hear, that their souls may live; and they are promised mercy and abundant pardon, as thus returning to him by faith in Christ, Isaiah lv. 3, 6, 7. The feast of love is prepared, and all are entreated to partake of it. But it is only by coming to the Redeemer that the mercies of the everlasting covenant can be actually enjoyed, and it is on this supposition, or as believing the Gospel, and so turning to God, that they are promised them. When promises are made to the guilty, while "far from right-



eousness, the design is not to comfort them while continuing in unbelief and impenitence, but to exhibit the cause, or spring of salvation, even the free love of God, and to encourage them to come instantly to the Saviour. Such passages of Scripture shew that no complicated process is to be gone through in order to our acceptance; that no holy preparation is requisite; and that no perplexing course of discipline is required, that we may be qualified for an interest in the righteousness and salvation of Christ. They shew, that, on believing the Gospel the sinner has access into a state of favour with God, and enjoys the blessing of peace with him through resting his hopes on the atonement of Jesus.

On the other hand, my dear friend, when promises are made to particular characters, as when the vision of God is promised to "the pure in heart," and the inheritance of the heavenly land "to the meek," Matt. v. 5, 8; the design is to point out the state of mind necessary to the actual enjoyment of the blessings. This state of mind is not mentioned as the ground or meritorious cause why the blessings in question are bestowed, but as essential to our being meet for deriving happiness from them, and so to their being blessings to us. No sinner has a warrant to consider himself possessed of the blessings exhibited in any promise, which teaches either the cause of salvation or the character of the saved, unless he has believed the Gospel. In the very nature of things, the blessings of redemption cannot otherwise be enjoyed. As after the Jewish high priest had purified the sanctuary, it was open to the Israelites for the following year, so Christ having made full atonement for sin, the way of access to the temple of God is now laid open, and all, without exception, are warranted to enter through the blood of Jesus. Now, when the testimony of the Gospel, in relation to this common privilege is believed in its true import, the individual, as it were, enters the sanctuary, and obtains personally, the actual benefit exhibited to all.

I beg you to notice, that there is a wide difference



between sinners being warranted to come to Christ as they are, for the mercies of his covenant, and being warranted, while in their sins, to look on those mercies as already theirs. God is already well pleased in his Son; and it is a blessed truth, that the blessings of salvation may all be had on believing in Him. But while sinners believe in God as the justifier of the ungodly, they hope for eternal life as in a justified state, and have their hope confirmed by growing meetness for the blessing. The mercies of the new covenant are proposed to all, but only believers embrace them. Hence, promises that respect character are of the first moment even to the ungodly, as they teach them that a change of mind, as well as a change of state, is necessary to happiness—that the happiness which can satisfy the heart is to be had only in the favour and fellowship of God; and that the Saviour alone can communicate that blessedness which meets their necessities, and can gratify the cravings of their restless and unhappy spirits.

While such promises are to be viewed in this light, they ought also to be taken in connection with the other promises of Scripture, in which is exhibited the spring of redemption. The latter have been called absolute promises. If by this is meant that, not for any thing in us, but exclusively for the sake of Christ, we are blessed, then, all promises are in this sense absolute. When they are made to particular characters it is not on account of any goodness in them, but for the sake of him through whom all of them are “yea and amen,” 2 Cor. i. 20. The promises that respect the coming and the work of Christ are absolute, as are all promises of a similar nature;—but yet promises made to men, as possessed of a certain character, are not properly conditional. It is necessary, for example, that a medicine be used before it can effect a cure, not as a condition, but because, from the very nature of the thing, it cannot otherwise be of service. Promises which respect the church, considered collectively, and which relate to her future increase and extension as a body, are absolute,



because they are not directly connected with the character of her present members, but not as opposed to others, as if the latter were properly conditional. All the promises of God are free, whether they respect the cause of salvation or the character of the saved. On viewing these two kinds of promises, along with the free invitations of the Gospel, it will be seen, that the first genuine comfort of a Christian is obtained by believing in the work of Christ, and not from any thing in himself. It will be found also, that all classes of sinners have the same warrant to go to the Redeemer to receive the blessings of redemption that Christians have to enjoy them. It will be no less evident, that it is by going as we are, to the Saviour, that we are changed in mind, and so become possessed of those holy principles and dispositions, which capacitate us for the actual enjoyment of the blessings of mercy: so that, while the necessity of a change of mind is taught, the way in which it is effected is clearly exhibited. I need not remind you, that there is a wide difference between a warrant to take and possess the blessings of salvation, and the actual enjoyment of them. The former rests upon the free invitations and promises of God addressed to the world at large, the latter is the result of embracing them. It may be of importance to add here, that setting aside the idea of a promise, strictly so called, the expression, "He who believeth shall be saved," though it implies a promise, may be viewed as, properly speaking, a declaration appended to the Gospel as an encouragement to believe it. This expression, taken by itself, is not the Gospel; ~~for~~ the Gospel is the truth which is to be believed in order to salvation. The blessings of the Gospel are said to be a feast made unto all people, (Isaiah xxv. 6.) so that it may, therefore, well be said, "He that believeth shall be saved," because whosoever really understands and believes it, will accept the invitation of mercy and come to the feast.

The Gospel produces effects in all who believe it, corresponding with its nature, and proportioned to the de-



gree in which it is understood and believed. These effects, however, do not constitute our title to the blessings of redemption. If the question is put, "How shall I obtain rest to my guilty soul?" an answer is not to be sought by self-examination; as if we had no ground for resting on the work of Christ for pardon and acceptance, unless through the medium of some good thing in ourselves. We must seek an answer to this question in the Gospel itself, and by looking from ourselves to that which is without us, even to the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God.

The power of genuine religion consists in the Gospel dwelling in the heart, and moulding the whole man by its divine energy into a glorious conformity to its spirit. Scriptural evidences of faith are never properly employed, then, except when they are used to ascertain whether we are indeed living by faith in the work of Christ, and deriving our peace exclusively from it. When conscious that we are cleaving to his cross, of what are we conscious but of fully admitting that we are justly condemned, that salvation must be a matter of the purest favour, and that nothing but the work there finished affords us the smallest hope? We are not at such a time comforting ourselves with the thought, that we have done well in thus trusting in the atonement, but we find ourselves shut up in it. Even when we can say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee;" we are not so much occupied with the purity and strength of our love, as overcome by the unutterable love of the Saviour to us.

It is undoubtedly of the first importance to examine ourselves, to ascertain whether we are advancing or declining in true religion, and to discover and correct what may be amiss in our spirit and conduct. The knowledge thus obtained of our character and wants, will be the means of exciting us to cleave more closely to the cross of Christ, and to look more fervently to him for the blessings of his grace. There is also an unspeakable pleasure in perceiving, from evident ef-



fects of a holy and spiritual kind, that the truth really dwells in us. This is a proof ever growing, that the Gospel is the medicine which cures the disease of sin, and imparts the blessing of spiritual health. It will tend greatly to confirm our faith, while it will gratify the sacred desires of the heart, and excite much gratitude and thanksgiving to God. On seeing the advancement of our cure, we shall be encouraged to continue in his fellowship, and must the more prize his goodness. But we ought not to examine ourselves to ascertain whether the Gospel is addressed to us, and whether we are warranted to expect the blessings of salvation on coming to the Saviour. These blessings are proclaimed as the free gift of God to all who believe, independently of the previous state of their mind, however ungodly and wicked it may have been. Our concern, therefore, in the first instance, is not to look into ourselves for evidences of a change of heart, but rather to look to the atonement of Christ, which is the hope set before us, and through which alone all the blessings of mercy can ever be obtained, Isaiah i. 18. Hosea xiv. 1—4. Jer. iii. 1, 12, 13, 21—25. Luke xv. 1, 2, 20—26. Acts iii. 19—21. Rom. iv. 4—8.

The true evidence of an actual interest in these blessings is seen in our believing the full and free declarations of the Gospel to the chief of sinners. It is only, then, in so far as our spirit and actions flow from this faith, that they prove our relation to God; so that our relief and comfort, under a sense of guilt and unworthiness, must ever spring from the message of mercy addressed to all indiscriminately.\*

\* In reference to this subject, I shall quote a passage from the memoir of the excellent Mr. Henry Martyn. Speaking of a particular affliction, the writer says, "His illness was of some continuance, and in it he was assaulted by a temptation more dangerous than uncommon—a temptation to look to himself for some qualification with which to approach the Saviour—for something to warrant his confidence in him, and hope of acceptance from him. Searching for evidences for the purpose of ascertaining *whether we are in Christ*, widely differs from searching for them to warrant a



Allow me to remind you, that, as we never can experience or see the effects of faith till we believe, it must be preposterous to look for them previously to believing. On the same principle it must be vain to look for them if we are not *continuing* in the faith of the Gospel, or to expect that they will go beyond the measure of our faith in it. Seek, then, a firm and an abiding persuasion of its truth and of its glory. It is not the certainty or the excellence of things considered, in themselves, but our *persuasion* of their certainty and excellence, that effects us. Look up, then, for the Holy Spirit, that he may lead you into all the truth.

Forget not, my dear friend, that the effects of faith do not form the ground of access to God. I shall endeavour to illustrate this by a few examples. Every one, you know, in the camp of Israel had the same warrant to go out in the morning to gather the promised manna, and to bring it home for his own use, Exodus xvi. 11—35. When he had gathered it and eaten, his hunger was satisfied. This was, no doubt, a greater degree of enjoyment than that which he experienced when he barely remembered the promise of the manna, and his consequent warrant to expect it on his going for it. But no one can for a moment imagine, that he could suppose that his appetite for the manna entitled him to go forth in the confidence of obtaining it, or that his enjoyment in partaking of it, and the vigour he acquired by it, constituted his right to it. He must

*boldness of access through Christ*; for this we require no evidence, but need only the passport of faith and our own wretchedness, and, as it is the design of our great adversary (such is his subtilty) to lead us to deny the evidence of faith altogether, so it is his purpose to betray us into a mistaken use of them. We find Mr. Martyn at this time expressing himself thus:—"I could derive no comfort from reflecting on my past life. Indeed, exactly in proportion as I looked for evidences of grace, I lost that brokenness of spirit I wished to retain, and could not lie with simplicity at the foot of the cross. I really thought that I was departing this life. I began to pray as on the verge of eternity, and the Lord was pleased to break my hard heart."—*Memoir of Mr. Henry Martyn*, p. 185.



have known that it was the gift of God to him, which was confirmed by the miraculous way in which it was provided. In other cases, the means employed by the God of Providence often lead the heart from himself, but in this case no visible means were used, so that the direct agency of God was set before the mind. The sensation of hunger led the Israelite to go for the manna, but was not his warrant to expect it; this consisted solely in the promise of God, and the accompanying call to go in search of it. In like manner, a sense of want and of danger leads a sinner to the Saviour, but is not his warrant for expecting relief. It excites him to go to Christ for deliverance and eternal life, but is not his title to any blessing. And as the enjoyment and the vigour which flowed from eating the manna did not form the title of an Israelite to it, so, in like manner, the spiritual health and vigour which are connected with the faith of the Gospel by no means constitute the title of Christians to the blessings of redemption. When a sinner believes in Christ he is more happy than when he barely heard that salvation was promised to all who come to him; but this does not arise from seeing, in the effects of his coming to him, a title to the blessings of the Gospel. He sees his title to these blessings in the declarations of God, founded on the work of his Son, and he draws his comfort from the character and the cross of Christ. He does not, under a sense of guilt, draw his consolation from his obedience, as if it were the source of his joy, but, taking it from the work of the Saviour, he finds happiness in his obedience, as an expression of gratitude to his deliverer—of love to his excellencies, as unfolded in the mode of his deliverance—of his desire to resemble that worth which he loves and admires—and of his delight in all that is spiritual and holy. In his devotions he is blessed with the enjoyment of fellowship with him whose favour is life—in whose presence, and in conformity to whose character, there is pure and satisfying joy. Thus every act of obedience has some comfort at-



tending it, and holiness and happiness are found to be inseparable.

I might illustrate the same truth by the case of the manslayer who fled to the city of refuge, Numb. xxxv. 14—29. Every such character had a warrant to flee to such a city in the confidence of there being safe, and this would be a comfort to him when he felt himself in danger. His sense of danger was necessary to induce him to flee, but was not a ground of confidence, nor was it a title to safety. Nor could the sense of security which he felt on entering the place of refuge, or his gratitude for the provision made for it, ever be viewed by him as entitling him to his preservation. Mere distress of mind, then, can be no ground of hope to a sinner, any more than the sense of danger in the manslayer could secure him while without the place of refuge. Neither can the gratitude of a Christian for his deliverance, of which his new life is one continued expression, be considered by him as the ground of his interest in the blessings of mercy.

Similar observations may be made on the history of the brazen serpent. Every one who had been bitten with the fiery serpents had reason to expect a complete cure on his looking to the serpent of brass. The belief of this would comfort the mind, when pained, in consequence of being stung. The comfort, however, of the diseased Israelite would be exceedingly increased, when, on looking to the brazen serpent, he found himself cured. But his cure could never be viewed by him as his title to look to the serpent *for* the cure, as it behoved him to look to it *before* he could be cured. His disorder could not otherwise be even lessened, and foolish and impious had it been to attempt a cure in some other way before looking, as commanded. The health which followed his looking would be a cause of joy; would make him bless God for the provision made for his recovery, and would shew that he had not mistaken the Divine order; but never would he suppose that the blessing was the title to itself.



In like manner, when a sinner, encouraged by the general invitations and declarations of the Gospel, first looks to the Saviour, he finds rest to his soul in that which is exhibited to all, and, at the same time, he finds a cure. The character of God, as revealed in the Gospel, deeply affects him. Contemplating his rich grace and mercy, as manifested in the cross of Christ, his heart is warmed toward the Father of all goodness, and is loosened from sin. That love, which is the health of the soul, is kindled and kept alive by intense and constant admiration of the Divine glory shining in the face of the Redeemer. Conscious that the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, and the Divine promise of eternal life through it, are his whole relief, he is captivated by the moral and spiritual glories discovered in his plan of salvation. His spiritual cure is thus begun, and it advances as he lives by faith in the Saviour. His spiritual health, which consists in the love of the Divine character, and in likeness to the Saviour, is invigorated by a steady reliance on the atonement. This health, however, he never can consider as constituting his title to the blessings of redemption. In fact, it is *itself* the great blessing of the everlasting covenant, and without it no one of them can be properly enjoyed. It is not a mere appendage to salvation—it is the very thing. The confidence inspired by it is like that of a man who has found, by experience, that a particular medicine has a salutary effect upon him, and so is led to confide the more in the physician who prescribed it, and the more confidently and assiduously to use it. On every return of his disorder such a man will have recourse to the remedy, the happy effects of which he had formerly experienced. A healed Israelite, when stung a second time, would again have recourse to the mode of cure prescribed by Heaven, and, on looking afresh to the brazen serpent, would find health and relief. In like manner, when, by our departure from God, and from the word of his grace, we are involved in darkness and distress of mind—when, under a sense



of guilt and folly, we are filled with shame and confusion—when sin has reared its head, and our evil principles have gained the ascendancy, we ought instantly to go, as at first, to the cross of Christ, and there seek, not only forgiveness, but a cure, for his sake. The neglect of the Scriptural doctrine respecting the general invitations of the Gospel, has caused much perplexity to Christians, when roused from a state of declension to a sense of their guilt and their danger. Often has it kept them from instantly employing the proper means of recovery.

When the real foundation of the Christian's joy and confidence in the sight of God is examined, it will be found, that all who are the friends of the Saviour adopt the language of the apostle of the Gentiles, when he expressed himself with proper warmth on the subject: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," Gal. vi. 14. It is by this cross that they are raised above the world, and assimilated to the spirit of heaven. Our faith waxes stronger as we contemplate this wondrous and transforming object. Love is thus cherished, and we become more and more like to the God of all goodness. The habitual exercise of this principle casts out slavish and tormenting fear, 1 John iv. 18. When we love and delight in God as the God of salvation, through the honourable medium of the work of Christ—when we rejoice, not only in our relief from woe, but that it is obtained in a way so worthy of the exalted Jehovah—and when all that is like to him engages our complacency; we cannot but feel that this is the very temper of heaven itself, and are fully satisfied that we have not misapprehended the Divine testimony. Finding our minds to be conformed to the character and will of God, we rejoice in him as our Father. We seek not into the inscrutable secrets of eternity, but rest assured of his love by what we even here know of his goodness. We cannot suppose that we shall be kept in the other world from loving God, in whom we find all our happiness in this.



On the contrary, experiencing here, that our bliss arises from contemplating and enjoying God, and from holy intercourse with him and with his people; we rest assured that, as death will make no change in the habits of the spirit, the same must be our employment and our bliss in the world of life and of love. Heaven is more a state, and a certain character, than a place, though no doubt it is a place; and the same may be said of hell. Whoever, then, is possessed of a heavenly state and character of mind, has heaven begun already, and is meet for the full enjoyment of it in the other world.

Permit me, then, to recommend to you to study the work and character of the Saviour as a manifestation of the character of God. Look to his cross, and to the principles and aims which animated him there, that you may be induced to rest on him amidst all your cares, and thus possess that peace which passeth all understanding. In this way it is, that gratitude and love, esteem and admiration, are most effectually cherished, and that the purest and most exquisite delight is made to flow into the mind. In the contemplation of that commanding display of excellence which calls forth the high approbation of Heaven, the heart is transformed into its likeness, and the sweetest tranquillity and comfort are abundantly enjoyed.

You will perceive, my dear friend, that my great design in this letter is, to show how free the promises and invitations of the Gospel are; and how fitted, faith in the atonement is, to yield peace and consolation to the soul, when distressed with a sense of guilt and the dread of the Divine displeasure. I dwell on this, because I know, from experience, its importance, and that many difficulties are felt by an awakened mind in committing itself to the free mercy of God, as displayed in the Gospel. Here, in opposition to all self-righteous plans of seeking peace with God, it is declared, that the atonement of the Saviour is that for the sake of which he forgives the ungodly.—It is testified that, through faith in



the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the guilty sinner is accepted, Rom. iii. 23—28; iv. 4—7. and x. 4—13. This is the sum of the Gospel, and on this the Scriptures dwell as the great truth to be believed. To urge a person to come to Christ, because life is connected with coming to him, while yet scarcely any thing is said of what the Gospel testifies concerning him, is much fitted to perplex. But when the attention is turned to that grace which moved him to come into the world, and which was so signally displayed in his giving himself a sacrifice for sin, the heart is drawn to him with the cords of love, and with the bands of a man.

To the Saviour, as thus revealed, they call upon all to come. Do not then perplex yourself with questions about the manner of believing, but consider what it is you are called to believe. Instead of disquieting yourself about the *manner* of coming to Christ, think on him who invites you to come to him—think of his atonement and the love there displayed—think on the many proofs which have been given of his sacrifice, in his resurrection and glory, and in the many promises of salvation through faith in him. You know that you are no farther conscious of seeing an object than as it affects you : and, in like manner, you are not conscious of believing any declaration made to you any further than as what you believe impresses you. In the former case, you are not, when looking at some interesting object, thinking of the manner of your seeing it, but of the thing seen ; and, in the latter, you are not thinking of the manner of believing the declaration credited by you, but of the thing credited. In like manner, in believing the Gospel, the mind is occupied with the thing believed, and not with the manner of believing it. We cannot dwell on thoughts of the mode in which we see an object, without forgetting, in a measure, the object itself ; and so, if we are engrossed with questions respecting the right mode of believing, the great truth to be believed is lost sight of, and being so, it cannot affect us. Of course, there is no wonder that then we cease to derive peace,



comfort, or purity from it. The mind is conscious of believing the Gospel just in proportion to the degree of its faith, or, in other words, in proportion to the measure in which it is affected by the truth. The great thing, then, is to keep the soul fixed upon the object of belief. If you have committed the charge of your property to an individual of substance and integrity, you do not so much occupy yourself with your having committed it to him, as with his resources and his character, and so it is with the sinner who has, under the influence of faith in Christ, committed to him his everlasting all. Believing in the power and grace of the Saviour, he places his confidence solely in him, and not in any thing whatsoever in himself.

Study the Scriptures, my dear friend, and particularly such passages as state most clearly the way of acceptance with God in connection with the salutary influence of the truth upon the heart. Do this with a devout mind, looking up to him who can guide into all his truth in its genuine simplicity and glory. If, in examining yourself, you see much that is sinful, the remedy is not to be found in poring, with heartless despondency, upon your disorder, or in attempting, by resolutions formed in your own strength, to subdue your sins, but in an instant application to the great Physician. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John i. 9. The stream of godly sorrow may flow in union with peace and joy through believing. Nothing can so melt the heart and conquer sin as a view of the pardoning mercy of him who loved us while in guilt and wretchedness, and who still bears with us and pities us. Having much forgiven, we love much; as did one of old, who washed the Redeemer's feet with her tears, while she thought of the magnitude of the debt which had been frankly forgiven her, Luke vii. 36—50.

Suffer me to recommend to you these hints. I trust that, whatever difficulties may be felt in committing



yourself to the promises of God, according to his gracious invitations in the Gospel, they will vanish before the word of him who is a meek and lowly teacher, and whose compassions never fail. May, you enjoy the unspeakable happiness which the atonement and the character of the Saviour are calculated to impart. Few, even of Christians enjoy what might be experienced. This should lead each to wait simply upon God—to commit all his concerns into his hands—and to cast upon him all that interests him, in the warranted confidence that he is willing and able to keep that which is committed to him. Proper attention to the invitations and promises of the Gospel will be found of the utmost advantage here. In the hours of darkness and fear, look away from yourself to that which is without you ; even the immutable and finished work of the exalted Redeemer. Dwell on the precious calls and entreaties addressed to the guilty and unworthy ; and look to the faithful promises which secure the acceptance of every one who, fleeing for refuge to the blood of Christ, rests his hope for mercy entirely upon it. Such parts of Scripture are addressed to every individual as particularly as though no one else were on earth ; and they are designed to encourage every sinner to come to the Saviour, just as he is, in the full confidence of a welcome and gracious reception.

I have witnessed, with pleasure, the influence of these views on the bed of death. I have seen Christians, amidst the weakness and the pain of a diseased frame, dwell with rapture, and speak with fluency, on the blissful freeness of the many invitations to sinners to come, as they now are, to the Redeemer. In the near prospect of death, they have exclaimed with most triumphant feelings, “ I am safe in Christ, notwithstanding what I have been, and come to me what may.” This has been uttered with an interest and an animation indescribable. The finished and unchangeable work of the Saviour has been constantly referred to ; and, in speaking of it, the mind has risen above itself, the languid countenance has



been brightened, and the whole appearance has expressed comfort and joy. Such a scene is truly edifying and refreshing. It affords a striking view of the true glory of the Gospel; and makes us witnesses of its power and of its suitableness to the nature, the wants, and the lot of man. Such reliance on the pure mercy and grace of God, where true religion had long dwelt, and had been manifested in no small degree, is fitted to show that, from first to last, the cross of Christ is that in which Christians glory, to the exclusion of every other ground of confidence, in the prospect of death, judgment, and eternity. I am, &c.

## LETTER IV.

### ON THE DESIGN OF OUR LORD'S MISSION.

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound—To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn—To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."—Isaiah lxi: 1—3.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WITH a view to the illustration of the freeness of Divine grace, and of the consolatory nature of the Gospel, I shall now direct your attention to the interesting passage in the book of Isaiah which was read and expounded by our Lord in the synagogue of Nazareth. He applied it to himself as the Great Prophet, and taught, that it contained the sum of what he was commissioned to announce as the Apostle of our profession, Luke iv. 20, 21. It consists, you will observe, of two great parts; the first of



which respects the blessings he was to publish to the world at large; and the second, the consolation and the joy he was to impart to his people. The sorrow referred to in the first part is not to be understood of godly sorrow in particular, but of sorrow and misery in general, as the unhappy lot of mankind in consequence of guilt. The wretchedness he there describes is that of those who are in a state of condemnation, and under the enslaving dominion of sin. In a word, the first part is a statement of the Gospel, as addressed to the guilty and depraved; the second refers to the sorrow which is characteristic of the children of God, and is designed to exhibit their happiness under all tribulation.

The Saviour declares, with evident satisfaction, that the Spirit of God had been imparted to him to separate him to the prophetic office, and to qualify him for it. As a prophet he instructs men in the nature of his other offices, and hence, by what he announced in that capacity, we are led to the whole of his mediatorial character. In a formal discussion, his offices must be distinguished; but they are in many respects involved in each other. Suffice it to remark at present, that it is from his instructions, as the messenger of the new covenant, that we learn the nature and the glory of all his official functions.

He announces to us that he is sent to preach good tidings to the meek. This is a general statement of the design of his mission.—The particulars of the good tidings are afterwards mentioned. In the quotation of the passage by Luke, the word *poor* is used for the word *meek*, Luke iv. 17, 18.—The term often signifies, not only the disposition of meekness, but affliction, poverty, and distress, which try it, and give occasion for its exercise, Isaiah xxix. 19. Psalm xxii. 26, compared with Psalm cxxxii. 15. In this sense it must be understood here; for surely the Gospel is not preached exclusively to the meek. The message of reconciliation is that which, by the blessing of God, implants this gracious principle, and, of course, it must be previously preach-



ed to those who are destitute of it. I speak not, you will observe, of constitutional gentleness, but of that meekness which springs from faith in the Gospel. The meaning here is, that the Messiah was sent to preach to the wretched; the afflicted, and the unhappy, of every class and character. Surveying all the complicated woes which abound in this sinful world, the Redeemer exclaims, with godlike benevolence, that he is sent with a message, which meets every case of distress, and is able to relieve in the most deplorable calamities.

The first mentioned blessing is a cure for the broken-hearted. This broken heart is not that in particular which distinguishes the humble and contrite in spirit. He here speaks of the unhappy in general, of whatever kind their troubles may be, and from whatever quarter they may spring.

When we look around us, in how many ways do we see vexations and troubles assailing and preying upon mankind? Some there are whose hearts are the seat of deep and painful distress, while there is hardly any visible cause of uneasiness. Others have found their circumstances, families, or friends, to be inlets to sorrow of the most trying nature. Here, some are wretched beyond expression, in consequence of relations and connections rashly formed; and there, others are deploring their bitter disappointment after much caution and care. On the one hand, you see neglect, contention, and cruelty; and, on the other, you behold chagrin, vexation, and settled melancholy. One deplors the loss of some darling object, or the failure of some apparently well-concerted plan; and another is overwhelmed by the dread, well or ill-founded, of invincible obstacles in the way of his pursuits. The wishes of the heart are often thwarted, the hopes of the mind blasted, and vanity inscribed on the best concerted and most promising of human speculations.

Multitudes who seem to possess all that the heart can wish, feel that there is no real enjoyment in the things of this world. Not knowing, however, of any



better portion, they continue their vain pursuits. They are weary of life, and yet are afraid of death. Not seldom do they envy the irrational creation, and pine away in secret, under a load of the most unhappy reflections. Though unable altogether to conceal their emotions, they are kept by the circumstances in which they are placed, and by a regard to appearances, from publishing their internal wretchedness. Sometimes they endeavour to get ease by plunging into all manner of sinful indulgence and of foolish gaiety. They assume the appearance of mirth, and seem to be happy, while, in fact, they are in a state of desperation, and are struggling to escape from themselves. Truly, in such laughter, the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness, Prov. xiv. 13.

There are others who, unable to restrain themselves, become quite ungovernable, and give vent to their inward misery and restlessness in the worst of passions, of words, and outrages against all who come in their way, and particularly such as are under them. Often do the sufferings, which arise through the instrumentality of fellow-creatures, lead the heart from God, and swell the mind against the immediate occasion of distress. Not seldom do those who suffer from the immediate hand of Heaven give vent to their uneasiness in murmurings and repinings against Providence. It is painful in the extreme, to a devout mind, to witness the strange and infatuated conduct even of the most unhappy, who often, on being told of the remedy provided in the Gospel, spurn it from them, and seem determined to remain wretched rather than yield to its influence.

Allow me here to refer you to some other causes of distress. Not a few suffer under a fearful apprehension of the wrath of God against sin, and yet shut their eyes to the truth, and refuse that blessed relief which it proclaims. They sorrow, not because they have sinned against Heaven, but because of the bitter consequences they have begun to reap, and the far greater evils which they dread to be in store for them. At times, however,



some of these characters do feel the baseness of sin. It is particularly strange that *such* should repel the Gospel of peace. But many are the contradictions that meet in the mind of man when unsubdued by the grace of God. The dictates of conscience are often repressed and resisted; the love of sin and of the world bears every thing before it, and prevents the result, which might be expected from a consciousness of guilt, and from the intimation of danger which the judgment in such cases certainly suggests. What struggles are often maintained between prevailing passions and unwelcome convictions!

Many are pining away under a sense of guilt and of danger who are altogether ignorant of the Gospel. They feel that they are wrong, but have never once heard a scriptural statement of the truth; of these there are not a few even in this land of light. Some, having been trained in seeking to establish their self-righteous methods of justification, and having found that sin, instead of being subdued, has gained vigour, are broken in heart, not because of the evil of their transgressions, but because their self-righteous hopes are buried in the dust.

Time would fail me were I to attempt to count all the kinds of sorrow which obtain in this state. Suffice it to say, that every day manifests that "the sorrow of the world worketh death," 2 Cor. vii. 10. Our own observation may satisfy us of this. Scarcely can we mingle in society, or look to a public print, without being informed, that this and the other one has died of a broken heart; or that some individual is pining away under one or other of the many disappointments and calamities which afflict the children of men. Often do we hear the exclamation: "All is vanity and vexation of spirit," Eccles. i. 14. Little, however, can we know of the multiplied sorrows of the world. What a spectacle must they present to the omniscient God!

But how delightful to know that, whatever it be which has wounded the heart, and threatens to break



it, there is that in the Gospel which can completely heal it. Here there is a balm for every wound, a cure for every malady. The Redeemer hath come to bind up every broken heart. Should its sorrow proceed from the same source as did that of the proud and politic, but the mortified and disappointed, Ahithophel—should it spring from the same haughty, yet mean, spirit that characterized Ahab ; when, because he was denied the inheritance of Naboth, he fell sick, became sullen and dejected—should it be the fruit of the same temper which reigned in the wretched Saul, when he endeavoured to thwart the Divine purposes as to the kingdom ; when he said he was “ exceedingly distressed ; ” when, in anguish of mind, he consulted with a familiar spirit ; and when, in hopeless despondency, he rushed upon death—should it be the wounded pride and mortified ambition of a Haman.—In a word, should it proceed, not only from the events of life, but from the very worst and most hateful principles, still, even in such a case, is the Gospel of Christ sounded in the ears of the broken in heart ; and still does it invite them freely to that which can completely cure them. It proclaims at once the free pardon of every transgression, and the means of complete deliverance from all the restless, unhallowed, and unhappy principles and passions of the most polluted and wretched of hearts. How suited, then, is the message of reconciliation to the state of this sinful world, and how fitted to illustrate the loving-kindness of the Saviour !

The next blessing which Christ announces to the world is that of liberty to captives. I need not inform you that men are considered as captives, because in a state of condemnation. The curse is denounced against every transgression of the law of God, and from this sentence no deliverance can be obtained by any work of the sinner, or by any unprincipled compromise. He who has him in his power is the Almighty and righteous God. Dreadful must be the state of those who are under the curse of him, in whom they live, and move,



and have their being. Must it not, then, be a blessing, great beyond conception, to be delivered from a condition so deplorable? Now, it was when we were in this state of guilt and of wretchedness, that Christ came into the world, that he might obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins, and restoration to the favour of God. Rom. v. 6—8.

But men are captives, inasmuch as they are under the dominion of sin: "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," John viii. 34. Though they boast of liberty they are the slaves of corruption, 2 Pet. ii. 19. How often are men impelled, by their evil inclinations, to follow courses which they themselves condemn! Frequently they do what they *know* they shall repent of. In their sober moments, they not seldom bewail their folly, and resolve not to repeat it; but no sooner are they met by temptation than they fall its victims. You must have often seen that which was reprobated in others, done by the very parties themselves who were loudest in their condemnation. I speak not of mere pretenders, but of persons who really did, in a measure, see the evil in question. Even when reason remonstrates, and conscience reproves, do men eagerly gratify their sinful propensities. They know from experience, that whatever pleasure may attach to the anticipation or the act of sin, it is followed by the most painful consequences, and the most distressing recollections, and yet they proceed. The very men who detest the low and mean shifts to which the selfish of this world have recourse, themselves forget all sense of honesty, and resort to many an unworthy means of concealing their wretchedness and guilt, and of transferring the blame from themselves even to the length of laying it on God. Say, then, are they not truly slaves?

In connection with this I would remind you, that they are also the captives of Satan. He works upon, and, by means of their evil principles, he instils into their minds all kinds of ungodliness; and, through the medium of the imagination, gains, by means of sensi-



ble objects, access to their hearts. To him they are willingly subject. They are his dupes ; for, by his influence, their understanding is blinded, and their evil propensities so called forth and excited, as to increase the misery of their bondage.

From this state of slavery Christ came to redeem us. He saw our wretchedness as sinners, and he appeared on earth that he might " turn us away from our iniquities." In no other way can we be made happy. To the man who feels his weakness, and is aware of the power of sin on his mind, and its utter incompatibility with happiness, it must be delightful to learn, that to be free from this, and to conform us to the character of God, was the Saviour revealed.

Relief to the oppressed is the next blessing announced by the Saviour. In the Gospel of Luke this is expressed by opening " the eyes of the blind, and setting at liberty those who are bruised ;" which is explanatory of the language of the prophet, that the Messiah is sent " to open the prison to them who are bound." The allusion, you know, is to the barbarous practice of confining prisoners in horrible dungeons, putting out their eyes, and bruising their limbs with heavy fetters ; of which practice the case of Samson is an illustration, Judges xvi. 21. The general idea is that of relief from the debasement and wretchedness resulting from the power of sin, and of the god of this world. Men are naturally blind to the excellence of the Divine character ; to the true nature of sin, of this world, of genuine happiness, and of real glory. They see not the relation in which they stand to their Maker and to eternity ; and are ignorant, at once of the way of acceptance with God, and of the means of being conformed to him. Their ignorance, however, is not simple or invincible ignorance ; but is a chosen and a beloved darkness. They " love darkness, and hate the light, because their deeds are evil," John iii. 19. Hostility to the true character of God, and aversion of heart from the holy and humbling truths of the Gospel, must be viewed as the real



source of the blindness of man to sacred and eternal things, Eph. iv. 18; Rom. i. 28. By means of this darkness the god of this world holds them in subjection. He takes advantage of it to instil error, to stir up their prejudices, and to divert them from the truth.

But it is to the honour of the Saviour that he reigns over a willing because an enlightened people. He scorns the blind service of a slave. He begins his work in the mind by illuminating it. He opens the eyes of the understanding; and, by means of a sound state of mind, which enables to judge, and justly to discriminate, he subdues the prejudices of the heart, Isaiah xlii. 6, 7. He fixes the attention on sacred things, and imparts a taste and relish for the truths of his word. The soul thus bows to his will, and the whole man is subjected to him. The knowledge he imparts gladdens the heart, and delivers from the wretchedness which the slavery of sin cannot fail to inflict; and of which the state of a captive, imprisoned in a dungeon, deprived of his eyes, and bruised with fetters, is but a faint emblem. Say, then, is not his service reasonable and honourable?

The object of the Saviour, then, is to impart happiness. This is the benevolent and gracious purpose of his mission; and, so intent was he on this work of mercy, that, to effect it, he became obedient unto death. Whatever may be the kind or degree of our distress, here is an adequate and suitable remedy. When taught by him, our reason is no more hoodwinked—the strength of the wayward passions is subdued—the clouds of prejudice are dispelled—and the world is stripped of that false and dazzling splendour which blinded and bewildered us by its glare, Acts xxvi. 18. Gal. vi. 14. We learn to give every thing its proper place; and find in God that which nothing else can impart, and of which nothing can deprive us. When first led to the cross, and when the spell which bound us is first broken, we are exceedingly excited. A new world, as it were, opens to us, Isaiah xlix. 9. The light of the Gospel,



when it first beams upon the soul, is as the breaking of the day on the weary and bewildered traveller. In not a few instances, so powerfully has the individual been impressed with the glory of what Calvary discloses, and so satisfied of the vanity of the enchantment which has just been dissolved, that, forgetting for the moment the depravity of man, he has imagined that nothing more was necessary to convince others, than a faithful declaration of that truth, the glory of which now appears self-evident. Pleasant, indeed, it is for the eyes to behold the "Sun of Righteousness," and to contemplate in his light the glory of God.

Consider now, my dear friend, the gracious intimation that the Redeemer was sent "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." This has been generally understood as an allusion to the year of Jubilee; when debts were remitted, slaves emancipated, and mortgaged inheritances restored, Jer. xxv. But, though there be truth in this, it does not comprehend the whole of what our Lord had in view. I need not tell you that, by the day of vengeance *of our God*, must be meant a day distinguished by many tokens of his vengeance; and, on the same principle, the acceptable year *of the Lord* must mean a period distinguished by his acceptance, or satisfaction. The period in question is that in which the Saviour finished his work, and laid the foundation of his kingdom. In this blessed work God rests well pleased. He delighted not in the sacrifices of the law—the fire of justice still burned upon the altar—and victim after victim bled at the sanctuary, Psal. xl. 6. and l. 8—13. But, in the sacrifice of Christ, he sees that which hath vindicated and displayed his character, and completely secured the salvation of his people. On this, then, he dwells with ineffable complacency; and here, there rests the fulness of his delight, Eph. v. 2. Matt. xvii. 5. The Redeemer, in the midst of all the sufferings and the shame which he endured, could look up and say, "But in an acceptable time my prayer is unto thee, O Lord," Psalm lxix. 13. This



was the period when God said to him, "In an acceptable time have I heard thee," Isa. xlix. 8. Such was the glory of the work then finishing, and such the delight of God in it, that, let him ask what he would, it should be granted.

That love to the world, which moved God to deliver up his Son for its redemption, must have been infinitely gratified in beholding the accomplishment of the Saviour's undertaking. He delighted in the glorious manner in which his sufferings united, and displayed the excellencies that constitute the very perfection of spiritual loveliness and grandeur. He rejoiced also, in the light which was thus thrown on all his works and dispensations. Creation, providence, and redemption, are here united. The two former are made subservient to the latter; being, as it were, the scaffolding to this astonishing structure. On this new creation heaven looked down with infinite satisfaction, and pronounced "all to be good." In this satisfaction the Saviour shared; and, with the most rapturous accents, he gives vent to his feelings, as he proclaims, with an uplifted voice, "this acceptable year of the Lord." The glory that accompanied the acceptance of his work must have eclipsed all that preceded it. This was, indeed, future, when he read these words in the synagogue; but he knew it was certain, and spoke as one to whom it was present.

Allow me *here* to refer to the Jubilee. It was proclaimed, you know, on the annual day of atonement. Sacrifices for sin and the communication of favours were thus solemnly united. But the proclamation of the Divine acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ, must have been the signal of a greater jubilee to the church and the world. What is it that insures the remission of our spiritual debts, that causes our deliverance from thralldom and oppression, and obtains for us, not merely the inheritance lost by Adam, but an inheritance in the heavenly country? Is it not the atonement of Christ? What gives us confidence in looking to the Saviour for



these blessings? Is it not the divine light in his sacrifice? What makes this year, or period, acceptable, or welcome, to the guilty and the wretched? Is it, not that it is a period acceptable to God? It is this which gives the mind rest, pacifies the trembling conscience, and fills the heart with joy unutterable and full of glory. We, so to speak, take our station at the throne of God and of the Lamb, and drink of the river of the water of life which flows from this blessed source. Turn your eyes, then, to the heavenly holy place; and anticipate the day when you shall enter it in person, and, in seeing the Saviour, shall be like him at once in bliss and in character.

Many are the difficulties which you may expect in your course; but let me direct you to the declaration of the Saviour, announcing the "day of vengeance of our God." This, at first sight, appears rather a curse than a blessing; but remember, that the first promise of mercy was couched under the threatening of vengeance on "the serpent and his seed," Genesis iii. 15. The cross of Christ was a manifestation at once of "mercy and judgment." There the powers of darkness were foiled, and their vengeance fell upon *sin*. In every age, indeed, has the deliverance of the church been connected with the overthrow of her enemies. The overthrow of Egypt was the salvation of Israel, as was also the downfall of Babylon. In like manner, the final deliverance of the redeemed is included in the threatenings of the ruin of their enemies, and of all who oppose the Redeemer. The idea intended appears to be this: "However many or great may be the difficulties in the way of obtaining the blessings announced; however numerous and powerful the enemies who may seek to prevent the everlasting possession of them; still, let no one be discouraged; for he who is sent to proclaim them to the world, is sent to overcome all opposition to his gracious mission." "He has appeared to overturn every system of error and superstition—to cause iniquity as ashamed to hide its face—to conquer sin, Satan, and



death ; in a word, to make all his enemies his footstool. Be not, then, afraid of any foe—be not dismayed at any affliction, for the “eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath thee are the everlasting arms. He shall thrust out the enemy before thee, and give thee the victory,” Deut. xxxii. 26—29.

This declaration is well calculated to encourage confidence in the Saviour. Like the pillar of cloud at the Red Sea, it has a bright and a dark side. Viewed in relation to the obdurate enemies of the Gospel, it exhibits their impotence and their danger—it is fitted to rouse the careless, and to awaken the most hardened—it addresses the fears as well as the hopes of mankind : and is designed to impress them with a sense of their real situation, and to induce them to flee from the impending storm. Viewed in relation to such as embrace the Gospel, it is a solemn assurance of their complete safety in the midst of all the hostility, and the opposition, which they may have to encounter. In the sight of calamities and dangers the most appalling, it says, “Lift up your heads, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh.”

The Saviour closes this part of his address by declaring that he is appointed “to comfort all that mourn.” This I consider as designed to meet every objection that might be alleged against the universality of the declarations which precede it. It is, as if he had said, “Does any one imagine, that though I have mentioned a variety of particulars, there are things in his case not included in them? Well; I now declare that I am come to comfort *all* that mourn, whatever may be the kind of their sorrow, and from whatever quarter or principle it may spring.” This forms a fit conclusion to that part of the address which relates to the world at large; and meets every objection which can be made to the interesting and consolatory message. The Saviour stood upon high vantage ground; he had a full view of the many and varied miseries of this world of evil; with Divine benevolence he looked down upon



the painful spectacle ; and with rapture he exclaimed, " I am sent to take away distress of every kind and form, to heal the disease of sin, under every modification, and to impart the riches of divine grace and consolation, to the guilty and the wretched of every class, and of every character.

Such, my dear friend, is the consolatory nature of our Lord's message to the world. While it is adapted to mankind at large, it is fraught with the most precious consolation to Christians in particular. The latter, however, are exclusively referred to in the second part of the address. They are not called mourners merely, but " mourners in Zion ;" that is, characters whose sorrows are of " a godly nature," 2 Cor. vii. 9. Their grief is characteristic of those who are converted to God. They have been led to perceive, and cordially to admit, the holiness and equity of the Divine law ; and are satisfied that, as sinners, they deserve condemnation. In the gospel of Christ they have found peace, but there also they have obtained the clearest discoveries of their guilt and rebellion against God. Their brokenness of heart flows from the consideration, that they have sinned against the highest goodness—from the painful thought, that they should have acted so as to bring the Redeemer to what Calvary disclosed—and from the distressing reflection, that the God of love and of all excellence cannot but view their character with abhorrence. They sorrow, not merely because of the bitter consequences to which sin has exposed them, but from a deep sense of its inherent malignity, Psalm li. 3, 4. The degree and the kind of this sorrow for sin, and the sense of demerit and of baseness on account of it, ought not to be viewed as altogether dependent on the number or the flagrant nature of their transgressions. Even in such as have not gone into the more defiling and heinous modes of iniquity, there is, when the Gospel is believed, a deep and a humbling sense of the depravity of the heart, and of that constant tide of hostility to God which is ever flowing in the



mind, and more or less manifested in the life. The conscience is now become tender and acutely sensible—the love of God is implanted—the temper is ingenuous—and the word of Christ so impresses the soul as to produce a due sense of the evil of all sin, and a sincere hatred of every transgression. Nor are these feelings confined to the period when they are first led to the cross. With this humble and contrite heart they wish habitually to walk with God. They feel that sin still lurks within them; and that they are ever prone to depart from their heavenly Father, notwithstanding all that they have witnessed and tasted of his goodness. Often do they lament their ingratitude; and a sense of depravity is their daily load, and the cause of heart-felt sorrow.

The Saviour comforts such by giving them increasingly clear and impressive views of the love of God as his God and Father—by enlarging their discoveries of the glory and all-sufficiency of his precious blood, and by unfolding to them the richness and freedom of Divine mercy and grace. When the mind is thus filled with proper views of the grandeur and suitableness of the Gospel, it is comforted under all its sorrows. The sinner no longer flees from God as an enemy; but, looking to the cross, as having made the exercise of mercy consistent with justice, he finds the agitations of the heart appeased, and the confidence of the soul commanded. The impressions of unbelief, and the forebodings of fear, give place to hope and to joy. Not that the evil of sin is lessened in his view, but that his conceptions of the Divine character are corrected and enlarged, and made to correspond with the gospel of Christ. The recollection that he, whose mercy is his glory, will subdue, as he has pardoned, our iniquities, and complete that deliverance which is expressed by his emancipating us from the tyranny of our sins, must, to such characters, impart consolation unspeakably animating.

The language of our Lord shows, that the Christian's-



comforts are of the richest and most animating nature. He announces that the redeemed, instead of being covered with "ashes," as mourners then generally were, shall have "a beautiful ornament or diadem on the head." That, instead of the dejected looks of the afflicted, they shall be "anointed with oil," which causes "the countenance to shine;" and that, instead of being the subjects of that settled melancholy which courts solitude, and refuses the words of consolation, they shall be adorned "with the garments worn on days of general festivity and thanksgiving." The whole of the imagery is expressive of a transition from the deepest distress to the highest joy; and it is well fitted to illustrate the blissful and the gladdening influence of the gospel of peace.

I wish you, however, to apply this language and imagery, not only to the comfort imparted when under a deep sense of *sin*, but likewise to the consolation afforded to Christians amidst all the trials and afflictions of life. The proclamation implies, that they are exposed to heavy sorrows—as inhabitants of a world in rebellion against him whom they love and adore—as confessors of the truth in the midst of its enemies; and as children of God, afflicted by him for their present and future good. Many and various are their trials, but, they are not "left comfortless," John xiv. 18. If they have peculiar distresses, they have the promise of peculiar enjoyments and support. The Saviour himself will be with them; he will give them of his Spirit, and will enrich them with his consolations. He comforts them under all their tribulations; by showing them the great design of their trials, and satisfying them of their gracious and benevolent nature—by leading them to the contemplation of his own sufferings, and of the glory in which they have issued—by employing their trials as means of enlarging their acquaintance with the word and the character of God—by enabling them to connect all of them with the heavenly glory—by imparting strength proportioned to their difficulties,



and multiplying their spiritual enjoyments as troubles increase—by giving them the happiness of his presence, sympathy, and care. In a word, by unfolding to them the many great and precious promises of the everlasting covenant; as including all their salvation and all their desire; as ratified by his blood; and as already fulfilled to himself as their public head. “Truly God is good to Israel.” Whatever be their sufferings, they are more than compensated by the inward joy, the peace passing understanding, and the good hope through grace, which flow from the favour and the love of God. When thus blessed the mind must even glory in tribulation, because of its salutary and blissful effects.

I wish you to remember, my dear friend, that the whole of the comforts in question are connected with the proclamation, announcing “the acceptable year of the Lord.” This proclamation is made to the world at large, to induce them to return to God; but it is made also to Christians. The relief which is provided for the latter, when distressed by a sense of guilt, and the comforts administered to them under all their trials, proceed from the cross of Christ, and from the glory which hath followed. The victory of the Saviour, on which the proclamation rests, is that which supports the mind of a Christian amidst all his fears arising from the temptations of Satan and the world, the evils of life, and his own sinfulness and weakness. His joy is, that, through him that loved him and triumphed in his cause, the warfare shall terminate in his being made “more than a conqueror.”

In connection with this, I beg leave to remind you, that the general blessings, in the second part of this address, include those in the first; but, in the first, they are exhibited with a view to the general guilt and wretchedness of mankind, and, in the way of invitation to encourage them to come to the Redeemer; while, in the second, they are promised to a select and particular class,—namely, to such as have embraced the invitations of mercy. There are blessings, also, which



must first be received before others can be enjoyed. The former include pardon, acceptance, a title to eternal life, and a measure of meetness for it. The latter, arise out of the growth of grace, the advancement of the Christian character, the confession of the truth, the afflictions of the Gospel, and our fellowship with heaven. Such must be the case in a salvation carried on by degrees. The true members of the church of God are accordingly addressed, as distinguished by the kind of their sorrow, and, in many respects, by the cause of it; and also, by the character they sustain, and the blessings they enjoy.

This view of the passage will keep from that confusion into which some have been led, by treating it as referring throughout to one class of characters. At the same time, Christians can appropriate all that is consolatory in the proclamation addressed to the world at large, as well as in that which is specially addressed to themselves. This, indeed, they ought to do; for the same Gospel which is published to the world, is that from which they derive their peace, their hope, and their joy. The first part of the proclamation is designed to exhibit the original cause of salvation; and the second to characterize those who have received it, both in regard to their lot and their state of mind. Pure mercy is described in the former; but, in the latter, the sorrow and the distress referred to are connected with the gracious dispositions and blessed privileges of the sufferers.

The blessedness of the people of God, as possessed of the consolation of the Gospel, is the means of furthering their sanctification. The design of the Saviour, in gladdening our heart, is, "that we may be trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified." The improper views which many have of the comforts of religion arise from their not perceiving the glory and freeness of the Gospel. Some such receive the truth as far as they see it, and manifest great tenderness of conscience, and a spirit of submis-



sion to the will of Heaven. That measure of truth which they do see has the effect of implanting and cherishing in them the principle of godly fear, which shows itself in a watchful spirit in regard to sin and temptation, and in a conscientious discharge of duty. This temper of heart leads them to follow truth as far as they discern it, and so to grow at once in knowledge and in grace. Others, however, are of a very different temper, and cling to their errors. To them the pure doctrines of the cross are deeply offensive, and he who states to them their genuine nature, is not seldom treated as indifferent to holiness and piety. This spirit is sometimes manifested by silent sullenness, at others by secret detraction; and at others by open opposition. What a proof of the deceitfulness of the heart!

Not seldom do such unscriptural views flow from the natural desire of the sinful heart to enjoy peace while not living near to God. This is a vain attempt; for, if we indulge in sin, happy we cannot be. Such characters, feeling the pain which is occasioned by a struggle between conscience and inclination, and being yet unwilling to sacrifice all for the truth, endeavour to persuade themselves that the joys of others are the fruit of delusion. They know not the constraining influence of the love of Christ, nor the sanctifying effect of a Christian's joy in God; so that, when alarmed by what they hear of the happiness of others, they very easily pacify conscience by condemning it as false or unwarranted.

It is to be expected that those who "think they have received but little, will love little;" but they who, contrary to their felt demerit, "have received much, will love much," Luke vii. 47. What efforts have not men made to serve a much loved and venerated friend? Is not the influence of the affections proverbial? If so, it were strange if happiness, in the enjoyment of the love of God, which must be accompanied with a sense of his excellence, and the feeling of gratitude, should fail to produce obedience.



“The joy of the Lord must be our strength,” Neh. viii. 10. because it animates us to every painful duty—it sustains us under every trial—it preserves us from an immoderate attachment to the innocent enjoyments of life—it renders the sinful pleasures of the world insipid and disgusting—and excites us to devote ourselves wholly to God, from a sense of the blessedness of his service. When the forms of religion are observed, without the enjoyment of its pleasures, there can be little of a filial spirit felt or manifested. The servile temper which is thus cherished will mar our obedience and our usefulness. We must be strangers to that liberal and generous spirit which, instead of presenting the scanty service of a slave, and seeking to enjoy as much as possible of the vanities of time, is bent on “abounding in the work of the Lord;” and anxious for opportunities of giving vent to its love. In the Macedonian churches we see the happy fruit of their abundant joy, amidst many and heavy trials, appearing in the noble sacrifices which they made for the interests of the truth and the disciples of Christ, 2 Cor. viii. 1, 2. The desire of the Saviour is, that our joy may be full; that, as fruitful branches of the true vine, we may glorify the husbandman. We cannot but be desirous of happiness; and it must be of the first importance that the heart be filled with spiritual and sacred joy.

It may be proper to remind you, my dear friend, that bodily disorders often cloud hope and lessen consolation, even in the best, Job vii. 2—5, 13. and xxix. 15—19. I mean not at present to enter particularly into the influence of disease, and shall only remark, that its dejecting effect is no disparagement to the Gospel, which was never meant for the cure of such maladies; and that it will be well for us to seek our happiness in God, not by indulging an excessive anxiety about consolation *as such*, but by growing in faith, and in love, in holiness, and singleness of heart. We shall find it best promoted by the progress of our general spiritual health. We shall thus be the more able also to stand the shock of



bodily disease, and to refute the prejudices entertained against Christian enjoyment.

Such prejudices are founded on error. There is, it is true, a vain and unfounded confidence; and there are some who can boast of possessing comfort while it is manifest that they know not the truth; but let not this cause jealousy of Christian joy. This fact, indeed, ought to teach us solemn caution as to what we receive as the truth of God; for though peace and joy flow from the faith of the Gospel, there is a peace and a joy which flow from some distorted and partial, and even grossly erroneous views of its nature. This is evident from the parable of the Sower. It may be found even where there are loud pretensions to clear views of the Gospel, but there will be found a fearful absence of that holy and filial fear which accompanies genuine Christian joy. It is undeniable that men may make their supposed clearness of views their righteousness, instead of the work of Christ, and so be puffed up with a false confidence, and with a vain conceit of themselves, while they despise others. Let it not be forgotten, however, that there is certainly some *error* in the views of such characters; for the more scriptural our ideas really are, the more humble shall we be, and the less shall we be disposed to glory over others. It is matter of deep regret that scriptural language and unscriptural conduct should ever be united. It ought not to be concealed, however, that while there are vain and presumptuous pretenders to the joy of the Gospel, there are also those who make a righteousness of their gloom and their inquietude. Such look on their want of comfort as the fruit of humility, and consider their uneasiness as an evidence of true religion; and so nurse melancholy, and repel the grace of the Gospel. They view the consolations of the truth with a suspicious eye, and treat the peace connected with them as if it flowed from arrogance, and were inconsistent with lowliness of mind. Beneath this there lurks a spirit of unsubdued pride. While they speak as if altogether vile in their own eyes, their



very self-reproaches are often dictated by self-complacency. It has accordingly been found, that when the truth of their self-accusation has been allowed, though in the mildest and most Christian manner, they have felt as if insulted, and unless when restrained by a regard to consistency, and to what is thought becoming among Christians, they have even expressed very strong resentment. It is truly painful to see complaints made to others, that they may be contradicted, and that the complainers may be soothed with the cry of "peace! peace!" It is evident that such characters, instead of being humbled because of sin, are full of self-complacency, on account of their fancied lowliness of heart;—and what is this but the spirit of self-righteous pride? That a spirit, bordering on this, should meet with encouragement among professors of religion, is matter of deep regret.

What ought we, my dear friend, to learn from all this, but to avoid errors on every hand, and seek to God as our portion and our "exceeding joy?" Psal. xliii. 4. When happy in holy fellowship with him we shall be fortified against temptation, and stimulated to abound in his blessed work. Finding that, in his service, there is a great present, as well as a future reward, we shall be kept from departing from him. What is perseverance in grace but the continuance of the Christian in the faith and obedience of the Gospel from a sense of the happiness connected with a life of fellowship with God? Finding our blessedness in the truth, we hold it fast. Heaven comes to be contemplated as the perfection of bliss; because there we shall be perfect in holiness. Now he who expects his happiness in heaven in perfect holiness, will naturally seek much of it here; and will, by this means, be kept looking to the Saviour, that he may be assimilated to his character. The soul is thus made to feel, that to know the Redeemer, to love him, and to delight in him, is the highest enjoyment, John xiv. 3, and xvii. 24. No other portion is then sought—no other object can satisfy the



spirit—and nothing more is felt necessary to full and permanent bliss. Psal. lxxiii. 25, 26; John xii. 26. The emptiness and vanity of the creature, even in its highest glory, never can be forgotten; while in the very gloomiest of trials, the presence and fellowship of the friend of sinners were a source of solid and of durable felicity. Hab. iii. 17; Rom. viii. 35–37.

It is thus that we come to understand why Christian joy is represented, not only as a privilege but as a duty. “Finally, my brethren,” says Paul, “rejoice in the Lord.” “Rejoice in the Lord alway; and, again, I say, rejoice.” “Rejoice evermore.” Phil. iii. 1, and iv. 4.; 1 Thess. v. 16. Nothing is commanded for which there is not an adequate reason. In the Lord Jesus there is all that can gladden the heart; and hence, these reiterated calls to be happy in him. His people, then, are kept by him through the sweetest, and yet the most powerful influence. They find that, in cleaving to him, they are cleaving to the only spring of holiness, vigour, and joy; and so feel encouraged to triumph over all opposition, and to go forward and complete victory. Phil. iii. 7–11. and iv. 13. The life of the soul is found to consist in a sense of the divine favour; and hence it is induced to abound in every good work.

Since the glory of the Saviour and the salvation of his people must fully harmonize, it must be delightful to resign the heart to him. In casting itself on Jesus, the soul finds peace. In reposing on him who is able to keep all committed to him against that day, his character is endeared to us, and he is felt to be our ultimate rest. In contemplating the glories of his character, we cleave to him as our all. If the little that is enjoyed of his goodness here is sufficient to persuade us that there is no other real joy, we must be attracted to heaven. Psalm xxvii. 4. We shall turn to it as the seat of his glory, from a conviction that never, till the whole heart is filled with him, will it be completely satisfied. Psalm xvii. 15. If, without him, all is felt to be dead; and, in communion with him, all is seen to



smile, doubtless his favour will be prized as our chief joy. Psalm iv. 6, 7. Though here we love him not as we ought, yet the desire of the heart will be, that we may love him with greater ardour. No higher happiness will be coveted than the perfect and everlasting enjoyment of his fellowship. (Phil. i. 23.) The aim of the soul will be to have him ever before it. Never, with him in view, can it again be occupied with the phantoms of time. It will feel impelled forward to the full enjoyment of that glory, the earnest of which has been found so enriching and so refreshing. Phil. iii. 11—14.

Conscious of many deficiencies, the Christian looks to his Lord for pardon and for peace. While he yields himself up a living sacrifice, he is deeply sensible of his depravity, and asks at the throne of grace for that sacred fire which alone can purify his offering. To him who loved him he looks for light, and life, and every blessing as matter of pure favour; but yet with confidence founded on his character and work. The prospect of being where he is, of beholding his glory, and of being delighted with his fellowship, elevates his heart. 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18. The same spring that supplies the city of the living God, even in the heaven of heavens, is the source of his bliss on earth. He has drunk of that water which the Redeemer alone can impart; and he thirsts not afresh after the poor and unsatisfying pleasures of the world. In his heart it has become a well of living water, bursting up, in holy desires and affections, into everlasting life. John iv. 13, 14.

In proportion, my dear friend, as the Christian grows in grace, and so approaches the heavenly state in the temper of his mind as well as by the lapse of time, he seeks that the Saviour would write his laws upon his heart, teach him the work of heaven, and refresh him with the delights of the sanctuary. Ought not, then, the desire of our souls to be, that, as we draw nearer to the celestial temple, we may imbibe more of its spirit, and anticipate more of its hallowed joys; that so our latest



thoughts, feelings, and exercises may be likest to those which shall be our first in the world of light and immortality? 2 Pet. i. 13, 14. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8. Such are the heavenly affections of an advancing Christian—such are the fruits of scriptural joy—and such the dispositions which glorify God. Delightful it must be to contemplate the plan of redemption as thus terminating in the complete assimilation of the soul to the Redeemer.

In that day may you “be satisfied with his likeness.”  
I am, &c.

## LETTER V.

### THOUGHTS ON THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

Remarks on the Scriptural mode of teaching—The law ought to be fully laid before men, and all false refuges exposed—The Gospel ought to be freely declared to them—Faith in Christ ought to be inculcated at the very first—The danger of stopping short of the Saviour—Every duty should be enforced in connection with faith in the Gospel—All true holiness the fruit of this principle.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM happy to embrace the opportunity to write you a few observations on some of the subjects which are the occasion of difficulty to your relative. I am well aware, that some have acted too much in the way that was blamed, and that much evil has been the consequence. Without entering at large into this, I shall give a brief statement of what was the practice of our Lord and his approved servants; which will shew what ought to be done by every instructor, whether in private or public.

Their labours are very compendiously recorded; yet, on a careful search, we will find that they addressed men on subjects relating to their everlasting peace, as intelligent, accountable creatures, and in a manner calculated to engage their liveliest attention. They did not, by unguarded and unqualified assertions, depreciate obedi-



ence ; but taught, that the whole law of God is binding on every child of Adam. Rom. iii. 19. Gal. iii. 10. They were the messengers of him from whom both the law and the Gospel proceed : and in their ministry the two were exhibited as in perfect concord. The Gospel was announced as good news from heaven to the guilty and depraved ; but this evidently implied the truth of heavy and alarming tidings of merited judgment and misery : for where there is no danger, there can be no need of deliverance ; and, under the government of the righteous Lord, there can be no unmerited condemnation. Salvation by grace must necessarily suppose, that our danger is the consequence of guilt ; for there is no more grace in the Gospel than there is of justice in the sentence of the law. Never can we admire the riches of the Divine mercy and goodness, without cordially acknowledging the greatness of our demerit ! It must, then, be of the utmost importance, to state to sinners the extent, equity, and goodness of the law of God, that they may see what is the will of the Lawgiver, and what it is the want of which subjects them to the condemnation of Heaven. Isaiah lviii. 1. Ezek. xxxiii. 8. They ought to be told of their absolute ruin by sin : for, if not involved in the dismal consequences of guilt, they need not the mediation of Christ. Without any qualifying language, the sacred writers accordingly declared, that “all had sinned and come short of the glory of God.” They struck at the root of all those delusive hopes which lulled the guilty asleep in carnal security, whether they arose from the abuse of religious advantages, or perverted views of the Divine law. Rom. iii. 9, 10, 11, 23. Luke xii. 8, 9. John viii. 33—40.

Scarcely any, indeed, are so ignorant, as to assert their perfect rectitude before their Judge ; yet, while they allow that they are sinners, multitudes are not in the least alarmed on that account, because they really have no proper conviction of sin, nor any just sense of their state as already condemned. Such characters are free from disquietude under the vague view they have



of their sinfulness ; because they confide in their knowledge, attendance on divine worship, outward relation to the church of God, almsgiving, and abstinence from gross immoralities. Now it is of the greatest consequence to expose such refuges, and to impress upon the minds of men what the law demands of them—that they love God with all their heart—that they serve him perfectly in thought, word, and deed—that they devote themselves to him without the smallest reserve—and that, in all their conduct towards their neighbour, they be guided by genuine affection. Mark xii. 29, 30. Rom. vii. 9, 10. Never do the Scriptures compromise things with sinners ; they never require any thing short of full conformity to the law, under the notion that man is unable to yield perfect obedience, and is therefore excusable : for his very inability is his crime. It is not physical, but moral ; consisting solely in the want of inclination, and in positive aversion to what is good. No abatement in the requirements of the law can ever be made in consequence of sinful inclinations. If such were the doctrine of Scripture, then the more a man hates God and the ways of righteousness, the more is he free from blame. \* It is needless for me to say, that this is utterly absurd, and is the very *opposite* of the doctrine of Scripture. It is sufficient to render man responsible that he has natural faculties which fit him for receiving a revelation of the will of God, so as to understand what he approves and what he is opposed to ; and that no invincible external impediment hinders him from conforming to the law of his Sovereign. John xv. 22, 24. Rom. i. 21. Luke xii. 47. If, in what he does, he acts voluntarily and cordially, without being compelled by another, he surely must be accountable. In Scripture, men are always represented as acting freely and of choice ; and, in consequence, as guilty before God. Psalm lxxxi. 11. Prov. i. 30, 31. Mankind are thus put on a level, and are declared to be all in equal need of salvation. Rom. iii. 22, 23, 24, 29, 30. There are differences among them as to degrees of trans-



gression ; but as the law demands perfect obedience, that man " who has offended but in one point is guilty of all," James ii. 10 ; having failed in that love which is the principle and sum of obedience to all, and having despised that authority which enforces the whole. Even but one transgression shuts for ever the door of justification by deeds of law, and subjects the offender to the curse denounced against sin. Gal. iii. 10.

But while men were thus told of their depravity and guilt they were told at the same time of the pardoning mercy of God, as it flows to the rebellious through the atonement of Christ ; and that through faith in this revelation, the forgiveness of sin might be obtained, and eternal life freely enjoyed. John iii. 14—17. Acts xiii. 38, 39. They were also informed, that this method of pardoning sin had been adopted, in order that, by its influence on the mind, the power of sin might be broken and the soul conformed to the pure and holy character of the Saviour. Acts iii. 26. Matth. i. 21.

Should a sinner be convinced of his sin, and sensible of his dangerous condition, he will naturally be filled with alarm, and will dread the awful consequences of his crimes. If, in this state of mind, the richness, and freeness of Divine grace be perceived, and he be led to abandon all other grounds of confidence, and to flee for refuge to the work of the Redeemer as exhibited in the Gospel, he will find peace to his soul, and will rejoice in the sweet and reviving hope of everlasting life. Acts xvi. 34. But if, instead of this, he rest satisfied with giving up some gross immoralities, and observing the external forms of religion, without going, as a guilty and helpless creature, to the cross of Christ, his case is truly to be deplored. It is not enough that persons are distressed in mind—the question is, What does their distress lead them to ? Some have very unscripturally told such, that their distress itself manifests a change of heart, and is an evidence that they have obtained forgiveness. Men have too often been believed, when they have said that they felt quite willing to be



saved in the way of the Gospel ; yea, were longing most earnestly to be so saved, if it would but please the Almighty to save them ; and they are frequently in such cases exhorted to some preparatory work instead of being at once directed to the Saviour. In conversing with such, we should beware of taking it for granted that they have no doubts as to the Gospel way of salvation, and no unwillingness to be saved according to it, provided God were willing to save them. We ought to labour to convince them that they know not the deceitfulness of the heart, and that, if they really understood the Gospel, they would be persuaded that the atonement is all-sufficient to take away sin ; that God is willing to save every sinner who is willing to be saved through it ; and that, if they perish, it will be because they stumbled at the cross. Never ought it to be admitted, that the obstruction to believing in Christ consists in any thing distinct from disaffection to the Divine plan of salvation. Let this plan be fully stated, and care taken that no resting-place be furnished them short of the Saviour. At all times, and in all circumstances, the Gospel ought to be clearly and affectionately laid before sinners. We need not be scrupulous as to the order in which we state truth, for all its parts are connected with each other.

Instead, however, of being exhorted to go at once, and as they are, to the compassionate Redeemer, such persons as I now speak of, as well as those who are at ease, are sometimes advised to wait at the pool of ordinances ; and are assured that, in so doing, the Lord will meet them and bless them ; as if they were willing, but unable to embrace the Gospel. This is far from imitating the Saviour, who represented the belief of the truth respecting himself, as the great thing to which sinners should at once be called. John vi. 28. It proceeds on the principle, that they are not required immediately to believe and embrace the truth. The consequence is, they feel relieved from what is deemed " a hard saying," namely, that they ought instantly to



return to God by Jesus Christ, as perishing sinners, and are thus lulled asleep. In fact they are led to imagine, that all required of them is, to attend the means of grace, and to wait the issue. Hence they often get quite unconcerned, and indulge in the vain dream, that they are discharging their whole duty, while in reality they are gratifying their sinful and impenitent hearts. The only reason why they do not instantly turn to the Saviour, is the very reason why they ever disobeyed the Divine law. Aversion of heart from God is equally the cause of both ; and what is this but the essence of sin ? Is it not the very thing they are called to repent of ; and how, then, can it justify or excuse them ? Such characters are *not* willing to be saved in the way of the Gospel. John v. 40. Rom. x. 3. They mistake that desire of deliverance natural to man, for a desire to be saved in the way in which God saves the guilty ; while they are far from bowing to the humbling truths and spiritual discoveries of the Gospel. *Nothing* hinders them from coming at once to the cross, but the depraved principles of the heart, and an aversion to the Divine method of saving sinners. John viii. 43—47. 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. Rom. ix. 31—33. This view of the inability of men to bow to the truth is fitted to convince them of their utter depravity ; for they are thus presented with a most affecting discovery of their “ enmity against God.”

It is of importance to observe, my dear friend, that the words “ can ” and “ cannot ” are used in Scripture, as in common life, to express willingness or unwillingness. The expression, “ No man can come to me,” means the very same thing with this other, “ Ye will not come to me.” In our ordinary intercourse we are accustomed to say, “ I cannot listen to you ; ” or, “ I cannot do what you wish,” when all we mean is, that we are strongly disinclined to do so. Thus our Lord said to the Jews, “ Why do ye not understand my speech, even because ye cannot hear my word ”—that is, they could not *bear* it. John viii. 43. So natural is this language, that even



children use it. Every one knows that there is a radical difference between that kind of inability which is independent of the inclination, and that which is owing to nothing else. The former is not culpable; the latter is the very ground of culpability. The Scriptures proceed on these principles; and, instead of addressing any as willing, but *physically* unable, to follow the Divine will, they address all as only *morally* unable—that is, *unwilling* to do so, and, of course, as criminal in the sight of God. They never attempt to relieve sinners by lowering the claims of the law, or so modelling the Gospel as to meet their evil inclinations. They at once call upon them to repent and believe in Christ. Whatever may be their uneasiness of mind, nothing but faith in the atonement can properly remove it. So long as they feel excused from an immediate return to God, they will not despair of help from themselves. But when fully convinced of the true nature of their character and state, they will be led to cast themselves on sovereign mercy flowing through the Saviour. This is the prayer of faith, and it will be heard.

We are not warranted to comfort such in any other way than by setting before them the cloud of evidence which accompanies, and is contained in the Gospel. Acts iii. 19. and xxviii. 23—28. Isaiah lv. 1—3. Matt. ix. 12, 13. Luke xv. The only good news we can inform them of is, that Christ came into the world to save sinners," 1 Tim. i. 15.; that he hath made complete atonement for sin; that, in his sacrifice, Jehovah is well pleased; and that whosoever believes in him shall be saved. Heb. x. 5—18. Matt. xvii. 5. Rom. x. 5—13. Let the invitations of the Gospel be clearly stated, as arising out of the character and work of Christ, and addressed to all indiscriminately, for the very purpose of removing every discouraging apprehension. Surely, if this revelation fails to give relief, it must be because it is not credited; and the reason why it is not is, that it is hated. John iii. 19. viii. 43—47. It is at our peril to comfort the sinner, by pointing to what he feels in him-



self, which, however painful it may be, if he does not embrace the truth as far as it is made known to him, and go to the cross of Christ, can be nothing more than impenitent distress. What the issue may be we cannot tell; but it becomes us to direct him at once to the Saviour of sinners, and to beware of so instructing him as to lead him to rest satisfied of any thing short of the work of Christ; which has often happened when men were led to imagine that services performed by them, while in unbelief, would be acceptable to God.

I am far from supposing, that distress of mind is in itself sinful. This it never can be. In itself it is neither good nor evil. It is but the instinctive feeling of every percipient being when in adverse circumstances. It is not, indeed, the object of complacency, but neither is it the object of blame. The sinner, when under it, is not on that account the object of approbation; but, as a sufferer, he is the object of pity. Even the irrational animals are represented, when in pain and in want, as the objects of the compassion of God. Psalm civ. 10, 11, 18, 27. And surely his rational creatures are not less so when mere distress is felt and expressed by them. Job xxxviii. 41. Psalm xxxvi. 6. Gen. ix. 5. Exodus xxi. 28. They cannot but desire deliverance from evil, and this desire the Gospel benevolently meets, by declaring, that "God so pitied the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God, it is true, regarded men simply as exposed to misery, whether sensible of their state or not; but surely a sense of it does not lessen his compassion,—must it not rather call it the more into exercise? In such circumstances, concern about the state of the soul is often the means of leading to inquire after the Gospel, and to search the Scriptures for relief. The sinner in this acts rationally, and his conduct ought to be encouraged. But when he begins to imagine that, in his distress, there is something good that will recommend him to mercy; and when on being favoured with a scriptural



statement of the truth, he does not immediately embrace it, but rests satisfied with exercises which are consistent with impenitence and unbelief, he has commenced a course of self-righteous labour. The consideration of his danger, his anxiety for relief, and his diligent examination of the Scriptures, to ascertain what they teach, ought never to be confounded with exercises in themselves sinful; but, the moment that he deems himself safe, because he is thus impressed; or aims at doing or feeling something from whence he may derive peace, instead of submitting to the Gospel of Christ, he then sets himself in opposition to the Divine plan of salvation. Through faith in the atonement, and in no other way, is he called to look for acceptance. In vain does he attempt to excuse his unbelief by saying, "I cannot comply with this; my heart is too hard; ask of me any thing else, and I will do it." In vain does he comfort himself with the notion, that he is not so bad as those who neglect this and the other precept; and transgress this and the other prohibition of the Divine law. The question is not, is he as bad as others? but, has he sinned? or is he sinning at all? Passing the discussion of points such as this, it is readily granted him, that there are degrees of *positive* wickedness; but let him remember, that, while a man is under the power of an impenitent and unbelieving heart, there is not a particle of *positive* holiness in his services, however serious he may be. What then can be said to him but this? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, (Acts xvi. 31.) and so submit to mercy." The unbelief of his heart is not merely a misfortune—it is a crime. He is not in Scripture called merely to something that is to be done previous to faith, but to faith itself.

The Gospel of Christ is not meant for the mere external reformation of men. Matth. xxiii. 25—28. Its great object is, to change the mind, and so to correct the deportment. The duties enjoined by the Saviour and his apostles included the service of the heart. Luke



xi. 39, 40. Obedience to their instructions was inseparably connected with the enjoyment of eternal life. They exhorted men to repent, (*i. e.* to change their mind,) and to believe the Gospel. In the course of their instructions they inculcated all kinds of duties, and reprov'd all manner of transgression; but all that they enjoined was to be done from the heart, and, if not, sin had been committed, instead of duty discharged. They know nothing of duties, the discharge of which should consist with the estrangement of the soul from God. Now, the inability of sinners to believe in Christ is not greater than their inability to obey any other precept: so that there can be no proper reason why they should be called instantly to other duties, and not instantly to believe the Gospel. In vain do any exhort them in the first instance to this or the other service of obedience, but not yet to faith in Christ: for they are no more unable to believe the Gospel than they are to perform such services, and equally unable to do the latter as the former—why, then, this distinction? In both cases there is the same aversion of heart, and in this lies the cause of all disobedience, whether it respect the law or the Gospel. If disinclination be the sole cause of unbelief, shall we act as if it were excusable? If so, is not disobedience to the law as excusable? and where, then, could there be sin at all? I speak not, you will observe, of confining ourselves to a particular order, in stating divine truths—I mean, that all should be connected with the cross.

In the instructions delivered by our Lord and his apostles, we find *every* duty enforced on their hearers. The precepts of the divine law are employed for the purpose of vindicating the character and administration of God, to convince men of sin, to show them their need of a Saviour, the nature of salvation, and of the holy character which it is the design of the Gospel to produce and cherish. Matth. xix. 16—22; Matth. vii. 24—27; 1 Tim. i. 8—11; Rom. i. 17—21, 28, 29.



Such a way of stating the precepts of the divine law is connected with the doctrines of the Gospel of peace, either expressed or implied. Men are thus taught the nature and fearful magnitude of their guilt; their hopes and their fears are thus addressed in a way highly calculated to impress them; and they are shut up to the one way of deliverance revealed in the Gospel. Acts iv. 12. and xiii. 40, 41; John viii. 24. As they cannot cease to exist, but must live while the Almighty and the living God shall live, they are called, by every consideration, to embrace the cross of Christ, and to commit their eternity to his finished work and his gracious promise. It is at their peril to trifle with this message of mercy, to delay one moment, or to seek salvation in any other way.

Though the Scriptures, my dear friend, know nothing of duties acceptably or spiritually performed before the faith of the Gospel, or which do not include or imply it, they do not wait till a man believes in Christ before they exhort him to other exercises. Isaiah lv. 6, 7; Luke iii. 19; Acts xxvi. 20. Such exhortations are explained by the argument of Paul, when speaking of the promise, that, whosoever should call on the name of the Lord, should be saved, he says, "How can they call on him in whom they have not believed? Rom. x. 14; and by his conduct in reasoning with Felix concerning justice, temperance, and judgment to come, in connection with declaring "the faith," or the Gospel "of Christ." Acts xxiv. 24, 25. His doctrine and his practice show, that every duty is to be enforced on the conscience, but always along with a statement of that truth which alone can produce obedience. The fact is, the *whole* of the law of God is binding on man as he stands, and every neglect of its requirements, and disregard of its prohibitions, exposes him to the wrath of God; and therefore all its demands may, and ought to be, pressed up on *every* man, in *whatever* condition. Independently, then of the Gospel, it is the duty of all men to obey the divine law; independently, of their being believers,



it is their duty to do so ; and they sin in every instance in which they do not : but never till they believe the Gospel will they indeed do their duty.

The message of reconciliation is the instrument employed to change the heart, to purge from sin, and to implant those principles through which, exclusively, acceptable obedience can be yielded. Rom. i. 16, 17; Titus ii. 11—14. and iii. 3—8. Hence all exhortations to duty are connected with the doctrine of the cross. Faith, then, is not by any means the *ground of obligation* to obey, but is that which *inclines* us to obedience. Hence the Gospel, as a display of mercy in harmony with justice, is to be preached, in order that, being believed, men may be acquainted with the character of God, and come under the medicinal influence of this revelation. Till we believe it, whatever be our external decency, or our preparatory services in order to fit us for coming to Christ, we still remain hostile to God, and in love with sin. Good works are not required to prepare for faith, or to procure eternal life, as if redemption were in any way by deeds of law. The very root of a solid and universal change in the heart is faith in the Gospel. Reformation ought to be instantly begun by the sinner, not as preparatory to, but in and along with, believing. All good works are the fruits and the tokens of faith, but cannot go before it. If by faith in the Gospel “the heart is purified,” Acts xv. 9. and if it be the truth that sets “free from sin,” John viii. 32. it follows, that they who have not really received the love of it, and who, of course, are not under its influence, must still be impure in heart and the slaves of unrighteousness. Such “cannot please God,” Rom. viii. 8. because their principles, pursuits, and aims, accord not with his.

The very design of the Almighty in calling on men to believe the Gospel is, that, by believing it, they may come under its transforming power, and be led to admire and imitate his character as revealed in it, and thus to seek their happiness in himself. If this end



can be gained without faith in the cross, then, in so far as a change of character is concerned, Christ has died in vain. Such, however, is our state, that it cannot. To say that, though it cannot be wholly gained without the reception of the Gospel, it may be so in a measure, is to confound that external correctness which is the effect of a partial view of the truth, with the change of heart which fits for the kingdom of heaven. This change is, indeed, but imperfect, even in the most eminent Christians; but still there is a renovation of heart. Divine energy begins the work, and also completes it. This energy, however, is not the ground of obligation to be holy; it only excites to obedience: for what it produces was antecedently our duty. It leads us "in the way that we should go."

The influences of the Holy Spirit are designed to open the mind to the glory of the Gospel, to overcome our natural hostility to it, and to bring us by faith under its assimilating influence. They are not matter of debt, then, but of favour. Hence, we are taught to pray for Divine teaching under a deep sense of our natural ignorance of divine things, and our strong aversion to them. Luke xi. 9—13. Psalm cxix. 18. When taught of God, we are drawn to the Saviour, and so find rest. How precious that peace of conscience which arises from a view of the transcendent glory of the character and finished work of Christ, through faith in which, without one good quality in us, we are brought into the heavenly family, and into the closest fellowship with him who loved us and gave himself for us! Blessed is the new spiritual character we thus acquire, in being brought to enjoy what God enjoys, to enter into all his views, to feel one with him in all that he does, to be happy in seeing his will done, and in doing it ourselves, and to be fully satisfied in the contemplation and the enjoyment of his glory. The faith of the Gospel inspires us with that love to Christ which is the health of our spirits, which raises above all difficulties, imparts holy courage and elevation of soul, makes duty



to be esteemed a privilege, and causes obedience to flow as the spontaneous effusion of gratitude: thus uniting the glory of God with our highest happiness. Such are the noble, and, shall I say, generous, principles of action produced by the truth.

The character thus formed is connected with eternity. The Gospel makes men better relatives and more useful members of society; but it is degraded when viewed chiefly as an instrument of promoting the temporal good of the community. Mistakes as to this have caused many corruptions of its doctrines. To gain the latter object, when they doubted of saving the soul, many have too much adapted their instructions to the propensity of man to rest in mere external deeds and observances. It were well for such to consider, that even the secondary object they have in view is best promoted by a full and just statement of the Gospel. Such is its nature, that it influences not a little, many who do not embrace. This influence must arise from its commending itself to the conscience; and, if so, the more scripturally it is stated, the greater will be the effect. This will appear evident from an observation of the different degrees of external morality produced in different places, according to the degree of simplicity with which the Gospel is taught. Compare the greater part of the European continent with this country, and countries similarly favoured, and mark how the restraining influence of the doctrine and practice of Christianity keeps pace with its purity. "Christianity will inconceivably ameliorate the present condition of the world, but it is only when she is allowed to develop the energies by which she sanctifies and prepares its inhabitants for a better. Let her be urged to forget her celestial origin and destiny; to forget that she came from God and returns to God; and, whether she be employed by the artful and designing to establish a spiritual empire and dominion over mankind, or by the philanthropist, as the means of promoting their civilization and improvement, she feels equally injured, and takes her



departure, leaving nothing but a base and sanctimonious hypocrisy in her room."\* The beneficial principles exercised by a Christian as a member of society, while they add to his usefulness here, are employed to cherish all that can make him meet for the heavenly world. He is sowing seed which will produce life everlasting. In all that he does, his eye ought ever to be on the harvest; for the scenes of this world are but subordinate to the eternal destiny of the soul.

You will perceive, my dear friend, that faith in the work of Christ is but a means to an end. It is designed to produce true holiness. We are all sinners, and if pardoned and accepted, we must be so of pure unmerited favour, through the atonement and intercession of Christ. But while, through faith in him, we are put in possession of the blessings of pardon and admission into the family of God, we are, by this very faith, in some measure made meet for the exercise and enjoyments of his temple. This is a method of justification which has the most transforming effect. Surely, when we contemplate the Saviour magnifying the law and making it honourable, we cannot but esteem it, and keep aloof from every thing that has but the appearance of disregarding it. When we think of his obedience, can we cease to be active in his service! Must not the study of his character assimilate us to him, and enable us to mortify every evil principle? It is natural for us, when conscious of guilt, and afraid of judgment, to be particularly struck with the goodness of God, as it appears in the exceeding riches of his grace in redeeming us from *wrath*; but when we contemplate the *whole* scheme of redemption, we are no less, yea more, struck with the love of God as it appears in saving us from *sin* itself. The end is worthy of God, and the means are admirably suitable and glorious as well as illustrative of his manifold wisdom. Indeed, it were vain to pardon a sinner, and receive him into favour, without changing

\* Hall's Address to Eustace Carey.



his mind. Such a man could not enjoy the privileges of the divine family, and even heaven itself would, to him, be as hell. He could not enjoy the society, engage in the exercises, nor relish the pleasures, of the place. Even in the seat of happiness, where there is fulness of joy, such a character would be miserable. Holiness is thus placed in its proper situation, as the grand object of God in the plan of grace. This view of the design of the Gospel shows, that it has never been discerned in its true glory, nor felt in its genuine power, by such as take occasion from it to indulge in sin. 1 John i. 5—7.

Never till our persons are accepted through Christ can our services be so ; but when we are ourselves accepted in the Beloved, our services are accepted for his sake, and in this way God expresses his delight in the work and character of his Son, of which our obedience is the fruit and the likeness. Heb. xiii. 15—21 ; 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. Obedience, then, is yielded, not in order to *obtain* forgiveness, but to express gratitude for *having* obtained it ; it is not yielded to merit eternal life, but to express the gratitude of the heart to him who hath given it to us of pure favour through the atonement of his Son. It is an expression of delight in the character of him who justifieth the ungodly for the sake of the Redeemer ; it is the fruit of conformity to God ; it is, in short, happiness in God and spiritual things, and it makes meet for the full enjoyment of him in the world of purity, holiness, and love. The Spirit is promoted by glorying exclusively in the cross of Christ, and living by faith in him. In his cross we see mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, all united. Here sin is seen to be in itself most hateful, and revolting to every proper feeling. It is by this that the heart is broken and made contrite ; that the transgressor sees at once his disease and the remedy ; his danger and the way of escape ; and is taught to put up from the heart the important petition, “ God be merciful to me a sinner.” It is here that the heart receives the impression



of the character of Christ, and becomes assimilated to the spirit of the heavenly world.'

That the Lord may keep you, and guide you into all truth, is the prayer of,

My dear friend,

Yours, &c.

## LETTER VI.

### ON CHRISTIAN COMFORT.

The most eminent Christians feel imperfections—An error as to comfort and obedience noticed—The proper source of Christian holiness and joy—The evil of mistakes as to this—Two kinds of distress described—The Scriptural mode of comforting the dejected—The use of self-examination—Holiness connected with Christian consolation—Their reciprocal influence—The use of past enjoyments—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I PROPOSE, in this letter, to advert to what you wrote me respecting that lively feeling of the power of our Lord's character, and that comfort in the truth, the want of which is lamented by many. I begin with reminding you, that the very highest Christians are deeply sensible that they are not influenced by the Gospel as they ought to be: and this causes to them much pain and self-reproach. Nothing, however, can remedy this but a devout reliance on the work of the Redeemer, and the steady contemplation of His gracious character, accompanied with humble and fervent prayer to him who teaches, sanctifies, and animates the heart. In all cases the Saviour is the source of peace and consolation to his people. He communicates these blessings by enlightening their minds in the knowledge of the great truths of his word, and particularly those that respect his sacrifice and official administration. It is, then, by keeping the Gospel constantly in view that the heart comes under its transforming energy.



There is, an error often committed here on which I shall say a few words.\* I refer particularly to it, because the principle it includes has not seldom been at the bottom of unscriptural views of the nature and spring of Christian comfort and obedience. It is this: Many come to the Scriptures with the same views as those which actuated the young man who came to our Lord with the question, "What good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" Matth. xix. 16. ~~Now,~~ the Bible was never intended to answer this question. *It is, indeed, answered in Scripture; but for the purpose of showing, that, in order to be justified by law, a man must, throughout his life, have been perfectly conformed in principle, thought, word, and deed, to the whole of its demands; and that whoever has broken it but in one instance is guilty of all. Of course, the answer to it is designed to "shut us up," Gal. iii. 23. to the plan of salvation revealed in the Gospel, not by any means to inspire us with the hope of being justified by law. It tells us how man would have been justified had he continued obedient; but not how a sinner can be accepted. The great question which the Scripture was meant to answer is "How can God justify a sinner in consistency with his holy character, the righteous claims of his law, and the general good?"*

It is evident that, when a person's great object is to have the first of these questions answered, his comfort and peace must be very unsteady. When he puts the question, "Am I a child of God?" his meaning is not, "Have I believed the Gospel of Christ?" or, in other words, is it indeed the truth? but, "Have I done enough to procure for me eternal life?" and, according to the view he takes of his attainments, must be his peace or his disquietude. In all his devotional services, and in all his obedience, his great concern is to establish his claim to the favour of God, and to the happiness of heaven; and in his exertions he may be very earnest, while he has utterly mistaken the design of that book which he considers to be a revelation from God.



Such a character cannot understand how a perishing prodigal can obtain forgiveness, and be filled with peace, on his yielding to the call, "Repent, and believe the Gospel." He treats the enjoyments of such converts as the fruit of error and enthusiasm. Conscious that he has himself no real happiness, he manifests the spirit, and virtually adopts the language, of the elder brother in the parable, "Thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." He turns from the Friend of sinners; refuses life from him as a matter of favour; and clings to his own self-righteous schemes. In some instances, impressed by what they hear of the happiness of others, and despairing of attaining the like, such characters sink into despondency.

In opposition to these most erroneous and destructive sentiments, the Scriptures address all as condemned in the sight of God; they bear witness to the dignity of the Redeemer's nature and the perfection of his atonement; and declare, that every one who receives their testimony shall be saved. The faith of this is the root of all real liveliness in religion, and of all genuine enjoyment. The sinner is thus freed from the distressing agitation caused by his fruitless efforts to make his peace with God; and, finding rest in the work of the Saviour, he engages with life and animation in the course of obedience.

The Spirit bears witness in the Scriptures to the important truth, that every child of God becomes such by "faith in Christ Jesus," and not by works of law. John i. 12. Gal. iii. 7—26. Now when, with a true heart, we can say that the Divine declaration concerning Christ and his work is really believed by us; and that his atonement is indeed that on which we rest, as the sole foundation of our confidence before God; we may take comfort from the promise of forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe. This is not to make faith itself the ground of our confidence. It is only to take comfort from the exact correspondence that we find between the thing we believe, and the disclosures



of the word of God in reference to Christ. Then do we enjoy the consolation of the Spirit's testimony in the Scriptures, that, to as many as believe in him, Jesus gives "the privilege of becoming the sons of God;" and so can rejoice, that, "as children, we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Rom. viii. 16—19. We must first of all derive our confidence from the general declarations of the Gospel, before any other part of Scripture can afford us relief. This enjoyment is always proportioned to our conviction of our need of mercy, and the degree of steadiness with which we cling to the cross of Christ. Every Christian finds that, in all circumstances of distress, and in all his difficulties, however long he may live, he must either lose his comfort and peace altogether, or receive these enjoyments in connection with confidence in the same truths which relieved him at first. Gal. vi. 14. Phil. iii. 8, 9. The life of faith consists in continuing to count it "a true saying, and worthy of the most cordial reception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Tim. i. 15; in building our hope of mercy on his sacrifice; and in drawing from it our peace and our happiness under a sense of guilt, and in the view of eternity.

In believing in the work of Christ we are induced to renounce every false hope, and to count all things but loss, that we may win him, and be found in him; that we may know more of his excellence; and that we may be more conformed to his character. In judging the God of the promises to be faithful, perplexity as to the subject of acceptance with him is banished from the mind. In contemplating the glory of the Redeemer's person, expiation, and kingdom; the offices he executes; the relations he bears to his people; his administration in providence; the riches of his grace; and the many truths and blessings connected with such subjects, we shall find constant enjoyment, and matter for everlasting triumph. Psalm xlv. 1, 2; lxxii. 17—20. xcvi. xcvii. xcviii. and cxlv. 10—13. Rom. viii. 31—39.



**Ephes. iii. 8—20.** It is extremely difficult, indeed, owing to the corruption of our hearts, to attain and to preserve this spiritual and happy state of mind ; but let us ever look to the Father of mercies for his aid. Let us dwell upon his love and his rich grace, as displayed in exhibiting all the blessings of the Gospel to us while ungodly, without strength, and ready to sink into the pit of misery. ~~Hither let us return from all our wanderings for rest,~~ and here let us abide as the seat of happiness.

It not seldom happens that, owing to the weakness of their faith, and from the want of clear, scriptural, and simple views of the Gospel of peace, Christians are deficient in vigour and usefulness. Now, though a person, whose views of Divine truth are very obscure, may be truly a Christian, his comfort must be small and very unsteady. It is at once his duty and his interest to pray fervently to God for his illuminating Spirit, and to meditate upon that redemption which is the theme of the heavenly songs, and the great excitement to heavenly activity. In particular, he ought to dwell on the work and character of the Redeemer, and on the free invitations and promises of the Gospel. Thus he will find that a Christian is one who is pardoned and received into the family of God for the sake of the atonement of Christ. He will find, too, that he is placed here in a state of training for immortal glory by means of faith in the Gospel, and by the various events of life, as made to bear upon his mind, so as to illustrate Divine truth, and impress it upon the heart. The nature and design of Christian obedience will thus be understood ; the beautiful harmony of Scripture will commend itself to the heart ; and rest will be found in its faithful testimony. This testimony declares, that, whatever be the number or the nature of our transgressions, there is no necessity for us to attempt the expiation of sin—that it is vain, and even sinful, to do so. Nothing as to the *ground of pardon and acceptance* remains to be done. On the contrary, the Gospel affirms, that the only work



through which the guilty can be saved is already finished; and that, believing in this, the sins of the most unworthy are blotted out, and their persons accepted. John xix. 30. Dan. ix. 24. Acts xv. 10, 11. Gal. ii. 15, 16, 21; iii. 11—13, 18; and v. 1—5. Heb. x. 5—18. Such is the nature of the message of mercy, that he who discerns its genuine import has abundant reason to conclude, that never would the facts of which it testifies have either taken place or have been promulgated, had it not been the will and the design of God that every individual who came to the knowledge of its precious truths should be saved by it. It cannot be that the God of all goodness would teach any man how the Lawgiver could be just and yet honourably justify a sinner, without actually conferring the precious boon. Never can it be that God will thus tantalize any of his creatures. The explicit declarations of Scripture, that all who know and believe the Gospel shall assuredly be saved, confirm this statement. Every individual, then, may plead this published amnesty, for it is an amnesty of the most general nature, every individual is called upon to accept of the boon which is thus set before and brought to his door. And this acceptance is no more of the nature of a condition entitling to the blessing, than is the act of a beggar who receives or accepts the alms of benevolence. It is only appropriating to himself that benefit which is proclaimed to all, and which thus comes to be possessed by him individually considered.

It often happens that, on hearing this, inquirers feel as if it were an act of presumption, in a state of guilt and unworthiness, to enter at once into the enjoyment of the blessings of salvation, by believing the testimony of God; and hence a course of preparatory obedience is commenced. Now, the fact is, the presumption lies in the very opposite direction. It lies in supposing, that, in course of time, by their repentance and reformation, they shall become more worthy of receiving salvation through Christ; and in waiting till they shall be so, before they apply to him. This is going in the very face



of the clear declaration of God, that all, from first to last, is the fruit of free favour, whether in respect of the price of redemption, or of obtaining an actual interest in its blessings. Nothing can be more presumptuous than to imagine, that the benefit of the work of Christ can be merited by those who are sunk in guilt and depravity; and to call in question the truth of God, who has solemnly declared, ~~that he~~ is well pleased in the sacrifice of his Son, and that his blood is sufficient to take away sin. The truth of these declarations cannot be distinctly seen by those who seek, by some previous work, to prepare themselves for an actual interest in the righteousness of Christ.

Permit me here, my dear friend, to advert to another thing connected with proper views of Christian comfort, and the spring of Christian obedience. It frequently happens that persons, professing religion, are in great distress because of sins which they have committed after having derived peace, as they think, from the Gospel. Distressed they certainly ought to be, and he who is not, must be a stranger to genuine repentance. With regard to this, however, it is of importance to observe, that distress of mind may arise from two sources. In the one case, it is merely selfish, as it springs solely from a fear that the evils committed are inconsistent with a state of acceptance with God. The blessing which the subjects of this fear connect with a state of salvation, is almost entirely confined to a change of state; though they think certain good feelings and dispositions necessary to entitle them to it. They have no true regard to the divine glory, or to spiritual bliss. The question with them is not, "Have I confidence in nothing, as the ground of acceptance, but the work of Christ?" It is, "Have I done what is necessary to warrant me to look to his righteousness for deliverance from future misery?" It is, doubtless, a duty for Christians to examine themselves as to the effect which the Gospel has upon their hearts and deportment; and they must certainly be concerned about their own salvation. But



what I refer to, is the practice of those who can never take comfort from what the Saviour has done, except when they have acted in a manner which they think right—when they have remarkable freedom in prayer—or when they have found their affections lively and warm. In such cases they are quite elated; their hopes are high, and their confidence great, because they think themselves qualified for an interest in Christ. But when they have fallen into some sins which burden their conscience, they are in the deepest agitation and alarm; not from the thought of having sinned against the God of all goodness, which is the true spring of genuine contrition, but solely because, by this, their hopes of heaven are darkened. They mourn, merely because they cannot look upon themselves as Christians; and this they, indeed, have good reason to question, when such is the sole cause of their pain. All that can be said to such, respecting the freeness and the richness of divine grace, even to those who have hitherto deceived themselves, can yield them no peace. They cannot think of resting on the work of Christ, till their affections are again warmed; and till they can persuade themselves that they are reformed to such a degree, as to warrant them to think they are now Christians, or, at least, possessed of the prerequisites necessary to justify an application to the Saviour. They are, of course, rather angry with themselves than truly sorry that they have sinned against Heaven. Sin is thus viewed, not as opposed to the glory and the will of God, but as a hindrance to the enjoyment of pleasurable feelings, and the indulgence of the vague hope of happiness hereafter. Now, disquietude and fear of this kind are removed, not by looking, as guilty and ruined sinners, to the cross of Christ, but by the return of warm feelings, and a supposed reformation of conduct, attained by very different means than by faith in Christ.

I beg you to observe, that, when I speak of their warmth and their reformation as attained by other means than the truth, I am far from meaning that, even when



these are produced by the Gospel, they are the ground of peace to the conscience. By no means. Our peace arises from that which is without us—the perfect work of the Saviour. It is the office of the Spirit to testify of this; and, by the truth concerning it, to warm and purify the heart. When the effect of his influence is put in the room of the sacrifice of Christ, the nature and design of his ~~work are lost sight of~~, and the simplicity of the Gospel is marred. All I mean by such expression is, that, even that on which such rest, cannot, in any sense, be acceptable to God, and, of course, it is no recommendation to his favour. This is corroborated by the fact, that, when even the fruit of the Spirit's energy, and not simply the atonement, is made the resting-place of the conscience, the glory of the truth is obscured.

Something of this tendency is, at times, found in Christians; but it is sinful. It evinces weakness of faith, and confused views of the Gospel; it must be attended with great perplexity and embarrassment; and cannot but impede scriptural diligence and obedience. Not that real Christians will rely on the effect of the truth as their warrant to trust in the atonement, but that they are in danger, when enjoying the fruits of the Gospel, of having the one eye, as it were, turned to those fruits, as a kind of encouragement to expect the blessings of forgiveness and acceptance, even while the other eye is looking to the Saviour himself alone. There is often such a mixture of self-righteousness operating in a manner which is scarcely perceived, and which the individual would never avow even to himself.

The other case of distress to which I refer, arises from a Christian feeling keenly the guilt of having sinned against the Father of mercies, whose loving-kindness is ever flowing, and is displayed in the forgiveness of his many daily offences, and in the constant advancement of his bliss. This is not felt merely, when he dreads wrath. Even when the way of peace is most clearly seen, and the hope of eternal life is most lively, this



sorrow is keenest. The Christian readily condemns himself. He mourns, and is in bitterness, especially when he thinks of the exceeding riches of that grace which hath provided for him an Advocate who ever liveth, and hath thus made provision for his salvation, notwithstanding his many wanderings from God. This is a fire within him, kindling every holy affection. When he again has recourse to the great High Priest in the house of God, and while he thus finds peace to his soul, instead of indulging in sloth, he becomes more active and fervent. The overwhelming goodness and mercy of his Father produce shame and self-loathing, in union with strong consolation, and good hope through grace. Ezek. xvi. 63; Ezra ix. 6—11; Ezek. xxxvi. 28—31.

Do you, my dear friend, ask, What, then, is to be said to those who are bowed down, and daily distressed in spirit, by guilt and anxiety? It must be granted to such, that their distress is in itself well founded—that, however deep may be their view of their sins and demerit, it is not equal to the real state of their heart. But, granting this, let the Gospel of Christ be considered as it is exhibited in Scripture, John iii. 14—18; Rom. iii. 20—31; 1 Tim. i. 12—16. Let them put the question to themselves, “Do not the words of eternal life preach salvation even to the chief of sinners?” Do they not declare that he who was lifted up on the cross, can at once pardon and cleanse from all sin?—Do they not proclaim peace through the propitiatory work of Christ, even to them who are far off?—Why, then, do I not relinquish every false refuge, and cast myself, as a perishing sinner, on Christ for salvation?

Should a person be persuaded that hitherto he has been an unbeliever; be it so. *Deeply* as in this case he ought to feel, and *must* do, if at all properly impressed, let him *now* believe. He ought not to stand murmuring, as if something must be brought with him to recommend him to the Saviour; but should, as a helpless sinner, come as he is to him, willing to receive,



as a gift, all that He has to bestow. Many, who have long been distressed, and striving for relief, have found peace by the discovery that they were seeking it, "not by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law," Rom. ix. 32. Their true character has been laid down to them, and they have found that nothing was between them and absolute perdition but the atonement of Christ. They have then ~~been taught of~~ God, that, whatever may have been their guilt, the blessings of the Gospel are exhibited as his free gift to all who believe, and so have been led to the Saviour "for life."

If any who have appeared to know the truth, are disquieted in mind, let the same Gospel be declared to them, which preaches peace to the chief of sinners, on believing in Jesus. Let each ask himself, "Do I believe the Scriptures to be the word of God? If they are indeed the true sayings of Heaven, and if all my confidence is placed on the one perfect work of the Redeemer, then let me rejoice in the blessed truth which I believe.—Let me commit myself to the Saviour, who invites me to come to him.—Let me, with confidence, make all my wants known to my Father, and look, through the blood of Christ, for the faithful accomplishment of his promises." To the Saviour all are assuredly called, and even intreated to go, with the firmest persuasion, that to them, guilty as they may be, the blessings of mercy shall be given. Matth. xi. 28—30.

Self-examination, I wish you to remember, is enforced, not for the purpose of originating hope and peace under convictions of guilt, or of restoring them, when lost through declension into sin. It is designed to ascertain what it is on which we are resting our hope before God—to detect false confidence and peace—to confirm that trust which has its foundation in the blood of Christ—to increase Christian joy by the discovery of the sanctifying influence of the Gospel—to ascertain the progress we are making—and to discover and correct what is wrong. It will be found useful, also, when we are falsely accused. It was so to Job, to David, and to



Paul, who, under the reproaches of men, were happy in the testimony of a good conscience. Job xvi. 19; xxxiii. 10; xxix. 11—17; xxxi. 13—40; Psalm vii. 3—5, 8, 10, 14—17; 2 Cor. i. 12; vii. 2; x. 13—17; xi. 21—23. It is an infirmity of our nature, too, that, under particular kinds of afflictions, we feel a strong propensity to contemplate rather the dark than the bright side of things, ~~and to sink into~~ dejection and despondency. In such circumstances, self-examination; if we are indeed influenced by the truth, may prove at once a cause of correction and of comfort; because it may make manifest the healing efficacy of the doctrine of the cross on our diseased souls, and so establish our faith in it, and cause us to cling to it with greater interest. The Gospel is fitted to impart joy as soon as it is believed, and in proportion as it is believed, it will do so if not counteracted by some neutralizing influence. But a man may draw a kind of peace, from a system which, though he deems it the Gospel of Christ, is in fact a system of error. The Jews founded their confidence on an erroneous view of the covenant with Abraham and the law of Moses, and men may now do so on a false view of the New Testament Scriptures. Hence they often warn men against error, by calling on them to judge of their principles by their fruits.

There are kinds of dejection, however, arising from the propensity to look to the dark rather than to the bright side of things, and from constitutional distemper in body and mind, which unfit for self-examination. The body requires the physician, and the mind would be unhinged by intense thought, and in danger of forming very false conclusions in this condition of morbid and painful feeling. Let the Gospel itself be stated in the simplest manner, and let the afflicted be taught to dwell on it, that the truth may, by the divine blessing, effect what the case will allow. This is the more necessary, in consequence of the propensity such have to dwell on the more profound and difficult parts of Scripture. It never can be unsuitable to state the first prin-



ciples of the Gospel ; for whatever may be the character of the individual, it is fitted to do good. Physical disorders, indeed, it cannot remove. It never was designed to do so ; and it derogates not from its joyful nature, that it cannot counteract their painful effects. But, where the principle of piety is really in the mind, it will call it forth, and, where it is not, it is the only thing which can implant it.

- But, passing this, if at any time we find, on self-examination, that the truth is healing our souls, we become increasingly satisfied that we are not deceiving ourselves ; that it is, indeed, the truth which we have believed ; and that it is the grace of God on which our confidence is fixed. If we are living by the faith of the Son of God, we shall see, in some measure, of the effects of the truth ; though, on examining ourselves, we shall see much, also, that is calculated to humble us. This is fitted, however, to lead us to cleave, with renewed eagerness, to that truth, the healing power of which we, in some degree, feel. The views obtained of our evils and deficiencies may prove of the highest advantage ; while the proofs we have of the sanctifying influence of the wholesome truths of the Gospel will afford us joy.

Such joy is far from being inconsistent with the deepest humility. Christian lowliness of mind by no means implies that we are unconscious of what the grace of God hath effected in us. The Scriptures suppose, that Christians are aware that they differ from others ; and the addresses there made to them proceed from the principle, that they are distinguished by the divine goodness. 1 Thess. v. 5—8. Ephes. v. 8. Humility, then, is not founded on ignorance of what God hath wrought in us. It springs from proper views of the grace which hath made us to differ. 1 Cor. iv. 7. and xv. 8—10. Feeling that flesh and blood hath not revealed the truth to us, and that we owe all we are to the same grace which gave the Saviour, we adore our Father who is in heaven ; and, while we are abased in



the dust before him, we are grateful for what he hath done in us, as well as for us. His character and his love appear in the former as well as in the latter. Rom. vi. 17, 21, 22, 23. 1 Cor. vi. 11. 1 Thess. i. 9, 10. While joy arises, in the first instance, from believing the testimony of God, it is preserved by continuing in the faith, and is increased, in proportion as we act and suffer under its medicinal and sanctifying influence. 2 Pet. i. 1—11. James i. 25.

Self-examination, then, is of the utmost importance. It serves to ascertain whether we are holding fast the truth or letting it slip—whether we are growing in grace or backsliding from God, which it must be of the greatest moment to consider. It is an error, however, to have recourse to this, under the fear which hath torment, for the purpose of obtaining deliverance from despondency or dejection under a consciousness of *guilt* and *declension*. Should we do so, and seek relief by contemplating the features of our own character more than the work of Christ; and, particularly, if we judge of our character by the estimation of our friends, who may have very mistaken views of us and of the truth, we are going from the great foundation, are putting the feelings of our minds, and the opinions of our friends, in the room of the great work finished by the Son of God, and of the Gospel which reveals it. When we rest on the atonement, and derive from it all our hope, we are called to examine what effects it produces, and to see that its genuine influence be felt. But if, instead of examining ourselves when we have a sense of peace through the sacrifice of Christ, we only do so when labouring under a sense of guilt, in order to discover in our love, repentance, or obedience, a reason for rest to the conscience, we are putting these evidences in the place of the atonement. As the effect cannot be before the cause, we cannot be possessed of the fruits and tokens of genuine religion till we have believed in Christ. Of what are they fruits and evidences, but of faith in his finished work, and of confidence in it, as



the sole ground of acceptance with God? No effects in us, then, can be proofs of our relation to the Saviour, unless they be such as we know to be produced by faith in his cross. The degree, also, in which such effects are found, will be in proportion to the simplicity and steadiness of our trust in him. With this, too, will our comfort correspond. If his work is not the beginning and fountain-head of our confidence, the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting covenant can yield us no scriptural or permanent consolation. Nor is it enough that we once believed in him; we must continue in the faith. Our duty and our privilege is to hold fellowship with our Lord now, and not merely to remember that we did so formerly. Israel daily gathered manna, but what they gathered yesterday would not serve them beyond it, for it would not keep. Yet the recollection of what they had gathered formerly would encourage them to go and look for more. And, in like manner, the recollection of the work of God on the soul formerly will not sanctify it to-day, any more than present hunger can be allayed by recollecting the idea of what we formerly feasted on; but yet it will be found very useful in encouraging us to return to the food which once nourished us, and to the fountain where our former thirst was assuaged. It is only in so far as it is calculated to regain our former sensations, that the remembrance of them can be of service. In a time of declension, it will be deeply humbling to look back; and, if it be the means of recovering our affection towards sacred things, it will be truly salutary. Heb. x. 32. Rev. ii. 5; iii. 3. Gal. iv. 15. But if we dream of gaining peace by a mere recollection of past affections, while at present we are cold and insensible, we shall be sorely disappointed; or, which is worse, we shall become the victims of a delusive satisfaction. The Psalmist called to mind his song in the night; he communed with his own heart; his spirit made diligent search; but all would not do; he found no relief till he said, "This is my infirmity: I will



remember the years of the right hand of the Most High ; I will remember the works of the Lord." Psalm lxxvii. So let us turn from unavailing inquiries, and fix our minds on that wonderful work and deliverance, of which the ancient works of the Lord of Israel, and the deliverances vouchsafed them, were but figures. It is thus that the mind is elevated and enlightened—that the affections are warmed and ~~captivated~~—and that the whole soul is stirred up to bless and to magnify the character of the Saviour. Such is the way in which scriptural peace and comfort must originate. There is in some minds a morbid solicitude for lively emotions as an end. It is true, indeed, that many exercises of piety cannot be performed without emotion, but then the emotion is merely accessory, a necessary quality of the thing pursued, and not itself, the object of pursuit. Certain kinds of enjoyment in religion are made by not a few, the direct and immediate object of all their services, and they are in consequence unnaturally stimulated, in order to emotion, while the claims of duty are too often neglected, or have but a secondary place. They hunt after excitement ; plain wholesome truths have no charms for them, and as in other cases, the cordial which exhilarates their spirits at one time leads to their proportional depression at another.

Allow me to remind you, that Christian consolation is designed as a means to promote active Christian holiness. Having found rest to our souls where the divine justice found rest, the mind is awakened to a sense of the abundant goodness and rich grace of God ; and is impelled, by the delightful and yet powerful influence of love and gratitude, to serve him with all the heart, and cheerfully to suffer for his sake. Phil. iii. 7—14. It is of the first importance to remember, also, that this consolation is increased by obedience. John xiv. 21, 23. When we keep the path of duty, and obey the commandments of our Lord, the truth, under the influence of which we obey, is the more fixed in the heart ; and the service of him who loved us and gave himself for us



is found to be itself happiness. Not only will Christian principles produce good acts, but those acts will increase the principles. These two have a reciprocal influence. In living by faith, we embrace a system of motives, which daily increase in power by their habitual operations. Every event, and every action, is made the means of an accession of strength to the great sources of obedience. James ii. 22. 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

On the other hand, if we let the truth slip out of our minds, we shall fall into sin ; and the longer we continue in the path of disobedience the more will the truth be forgotten. 2 Pet. i. 9. Before we can recover our lost peace, sin, like the accursed thing in the camp of Israel, must be cast out. I refer not to sins of infirmity, nor to the imperfections which attach to the best services of the most spiritual Christian ; I speak of an allowed habit of inconsistent and sinful conduct ; of a cold and earthly state of mind ; and of evils which are not the effect of a sudden and powerful temptation, but the result of a course of secret declension from spirituality of mind, and devout intercourse with God. The man who can maintain his confidence, and boast of his happiness, while in such a condition, must be hardened indeed. It becomes God to frown upon us in this state, by withholding the light of his countenance. In the very nature of things, indeed, we cannot, in such circumstances, have spiritual happiness. The remedy is to retrace our steps, and return to God by renewed faith in Christ. We must seek rest as we sought it at first. In vain do we seek to recover liveliness and ardour in religion, if we keep not the cross of Christ constantly in view. It is a conviction of his grace and mercy which influences the heart with love to him, and binds it to him with the bonds of ardent attachment and permanent gratitude. It is the believing contemplation of the Gospel which mortifies sin, and produces all the fruits of Christian obedience. 1 John ii. 1, 2. Jonah ii. 4. But beware, as I have already hinted, of thinking that nothing short of lively emotions or rap-



ture is worthy of the name of joy. The powers of the mind will bear only a certain degree of exertion, with advantage; go beyond this, and they are injured. There is a calm sunshine of the soul, an even tranquil and serene temper of mind, which may well be called "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." The former state will in this world, be at best but fluctuating, whereas the latter may be permanently maintained.

The recollection of past enjoyments, when, in living by faith, sin was more bitter to us than death, and the Saviour was felt to be a refuge from all evil, and the source of all happiness, will serve to show at once our folly and our guilt. Have we, indeed, left the God of our mercies, and returned to vanity? If so, how aggravated is our sin! Is this our kindness to our friend? Surely, the remembrance of past joys, instead of relieving, must add torture to the heart. Psalm lxxvii. 3. They remind us of the goodness of God, and of our base ingratitude. Yet, blessed be his name, he invites us to return to him. We are not straitened in him, but in our own bowels. Though, like lost sheep, we have gone astray, and are entangled in our own corruptions, let us look to "the good Shepherd, that he may restore our souls." Let Calvary again occupy our hearts.

Turn then, my dear friend, to what the Saviour did, and to the divine delight in his character as expressed, in his glory; and thus, I trust, your difficulties will vanish. What the magnet is to the steel, will the truths, the promises, and the character of God, as exhibited in the work and kingdom of the Saviour be to genuine religion. They will call it forth; and, besides this, they will exercise and strengthen it. This appears a plan too simple, and we naturally aim at something more complex. Thus the very simplicity of the method is that which makes it so difficult for us to adopt, and keep by it; and hence, much of the opposition of the heart to the truth. This is illustrated by the history of Naaman the Syrian, who, in order to his cure, expected to be called to do or witness something great in the eyes



of the world, and not merely to go and wash in Jordan. 2 Kings v: 8—14. The same principle still blinds the minds of “the wise and the prudent of this world” to the plain but humbling doctrines of the cross, Matth. xi. 25, 26. It is thus that they are hid from the proud, and revealed unto babes.

It is delightful to be enabled to cast our all upon God, and submissively to live by faith in Christ. In order to this, much prayer is necessary. I mean not merely stated devotion, but a spiritual and devotional state of mind. The hearts of the children of God need not be discouraged. The Redeemer knows their wants, and feels for them with the tenderest sympathy. On him, then, cast all your cares, and ask of him all that you need. He can comfort and strengthen you, and cause the spirit of bondage to give place to the spirit of adoption. Look to him, that he may dissipate your darkness, still the inward disquietude of the soul, and pour his richest blessings into your heart; for he giveth liberally, and never upbraideth. His cross subdues the power of sin, and cherishes every holy principle. How sweet it is to take our place there, and to enjoy all which it so wondrously displays! I am, &c.

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## LETTER VII.

### ON THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF THE TRUTH.

The Divine character displayed in the Gospel—Its fitness to impart peace—Mistakes regarding it—Its influence in promoting sanctification—The necessity of Christian watchfulness—Self-righteousness not the only evil of which men are in danger—The promise of Divine aid—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I SHALL now direct your attention to some general observations on the practical influence of the truth. I begin with remarking, that the character of our Lord



is the genuine character of Jehovah. God is in himself invisible to us. The most correct description of him, unless illustrated by facts, could make but a feeble impression. The mind must be aided in its conceptions of his glory by a palpable manifestation of his attributes. Such a display is afforded of his character in the person and the work of the Saviour. It is given in the whole history of his life, but its full splendour appears in his atoning sacrifice. Indeed, the very name of the Redeemer was, in the minds of the sacred writers, inseparably linked with that illustrious act by which he poured out his soul unto death. Not that they confined their attention to the closing scene of his life; they connected with it all that preceded, and viewed him, throughout the whole of his humiliation, as gradually advancing towards the wondrous completion of his sacrifice. His character, at all times, bore on it the impress of divinity, which gives the highest importance to his history. In reading the displays of his power—his deeds of high benevolence—his feelings of tenderness, sympathy, and compassion—his unwearied course of self-denied exertion—and his unparalleled and protracted sufferings, we have before us the history of God in our nature, and see his perfections in a light the most familiar and engaging. The brightness of the divine glory is represented to us in our own nature, and through the medium of human feelings, affections, and passions; so that, instead of being dazzled with its lustre, we can contemplate it with the deepest interest, and the utmost steadiness. 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6. Col. i. 15. Heb. i. 3. In his cross, the Almighty is seen combining all that is profound in wisdom and understanding—all that is awful in holiness, justice and judgment—and all that is attractive in love, mercy, and grace. In the man of sorrows, we see wisdom clothed with the most engaging meekness and gentleness: and the grandeur of Almighty power softened by the most tender compassion, and the most generous love. While his sufferings attract our special interest, it is not pain or misery so



much that commands our attention, as affliction and calamity, dignified by the most cheerful resignation, and the most enlightened and willing submission to the will of heaven. In them is united, with the most distressing and complicated woes, all that is sublime and elevated—all that is pure and holy—and all that is amiable and attractive. Here is a mind infallible in judgment—to which the Almighty is fully known—to which all beings and worlds stand clearly revealed—a mind, in a word, occupying the highest vantage-ground—pouring contempt on all that the worms of the earth call glorious—and giving itself up to all that men count wretched and disgraceful. Ought we not, then, to enter into the views of the Saviour, and hail a revelation so honourable to God, and so admirably fitted to insure our safety and our happiness? In his wondrous work we see the curse of the law exhausted, and divine wisdom employed in harmonizing the exercise of righteousness and mercy. While justice and holiness are displayed in their highest glories, they are transformed into sources of blessings to the most guilty of sinners.

Permit me, then, to lead your attention for a moment to the fitness of such an exhibition to impart peace to the trembling conscience. If guilt is the parent of fear, this view of the cross and character of Christ, exhibiting the God of truth and of purity as at once the just God and the Saviour, must be calculated to tranquillize the heart, when dreading the tremendous consequences of sin. Isaiah xlv. 21, 22. Many, alas! seek peace by lowering the character of God and the demands of his law; so as to suit what they imagine to be their actual or possible attainment. And when, even after this, they cannot persuade themselves that they are what they ought to be, they trust to the divine benevolence, as if it were allied to weakness. They forget that, as the moral ruler of the world, it behoves God to maintain the honour of his law and government; so that, while sin is pardoned, it may not appear to be connived



at ; and that, while the sinner is forgiven, he may also be sanctified by the very means of his deliverance from wrath.

There are also numbers who err in a different way. When alarmed by deep convictions of guilt, the mind is apt to dwell on the most tremendous views of the Almighty. He is contemplated only as armed for vengeance, and as frowning in awful wrath from the tribunal of judgment. His character is considered as marked by all that is severe and unrelenting ; unsoftened by any touches of mercy and loving-kindness. Such a view of God must fill with the most tormenting fear and slavish dread. Now, the Gospel meets every such false notion, and declares that God, while he is light, is also love. It exhibits the most delightful harmony between mercy and justice, goodness and holiness, in the salvation of sinners.

The self-righteousness of the heart opposes this method of salvation, not only by directly seeking eternal life by works of law, under the notion that we are not so low and helpless as to need salvation in a way so humbling, but also in other forms. Thus, sometimes when conscious of guilt, and alarmed by the dread of wrath, the mind feels as if it were an act of presumption to expect mercy in its present state. It refuses to admit the consolations of the Gospel till it can think better of itself. This is a spurious humility ; for it proceeds on the principle that, before we can receive the blessings of salvation, we must, at least in some measure, be worthy of them. Now, what is this but the spirit of self-righteousness opposing the pure Gospel of Christ ? It is needless to distinguish between seeking justification wholly and partially by merit. The latter is as inconsistent with a cordial submission to the divine method of justification as the former. On the same principle, it is vain to distinguish between seeking redemption independently of the work of Christ, and seeking to qualify ourselves by previous good dis-



positions for obtaining the forgiveness of sin through that work. The latter is only a more refined way of opposing the humbling doctrines of the cross.

Permit me, my dear friend, here to refer to a particular class in whom the evil of such a system is exemplified. They are awakened to a sense of guilt—are, in a measure, sensible of the importance of religion—and feel the vanity of the world. They are far from being profane; yet they know not the genuine Gospel of Christ. They observe the forms of religion, and maintain a correct exterior deportment; but pursue a joyless and gloomy course, not seeing how a sinner can obtain the benefit of the work of the Saviour through believing the Gospel. They accordingly endeavour to obtain this benefit by exertions of their own. Through a want of knowledge, however, of the powerful influence of Gospel motives, they fail in their attempts at obedience; and, while they unavailingly struggle against the evil of their hearts, they are not seldom driven to a state bordering on distraction. Hard is the yoke, and overwhelming is the burden, to such! They feel that there is something wrong, and often inquire how relief may be found. Their counsellors, also, frequently put them in an improper direction; and what is still more to be lamented, they are startled or offended when the simplicity of Scripture truth, and the richness and freeness of divine grace, are clearly set before them. They have been led to associate a salvation by grace with licentiousness, and are therefore afraid to listen to an unrestricted proclamation of mercy. They are deceived by false representations of the tendency of what is, in fact, the uncorrupted Gospel of Christ. In many instances, they mistake speculatists and unholy pretenders for real friends of such doctrines. In other instances they confound the scriptural statements of the truth with statements which, by mistake in some cases, and with a bad design in others, are called by the same name; but which are, in fact, very different. It is not surprising that, to such persons, the blessings of the Gospel should appear un-



attainable, and its joys a forbidden paradise. The consequences to themselves, as well as to others, are most pernicious. The worst views are thus given of the nature and the fruits of genuine religion. The careless consider them as religious characters: and observing their dark and comfortless spirit, their joyless and heavy course, and mistaking all this for the fruit of piety, they are stumbled and hardened. How different from these are the fruits of genuine religion !

Good were it for characters circumstanced as I have mentioned, did they turn their undivided attention to the pure testimony and promise of God, and venture their all on the word of him who cannot lie. In vain do they attempt to make their peace with heaven. Christ is our only peace-offering. Eph. ii. 14 ; Col. i. 20. With his expiring breath he declared that his work was finished ; and the blessed truth is confirmed by his resurrection and his glory. Through this " he hath come and preached peace." Eph. ii. 17. To whom is the proclamation of forgiveness made ? Let the prayer of our Lord for his *murderers*, and his commandment to preach the Gospel first to them, answer. Luke xxiii. 34, and xxiv. 47. The design of his coming, which was not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, Matt. ix. 12, 13 ; his conduct in associating with publicans and sinners, which drew down the reproaches of the self-righteous, Luke xv. 2. ; his admirable parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and the prodigal son, all illustrate the direct and explicit declarations of his immediate ambassadors, that there are none excluded who do not exclude themselves. 1 Tim. i. 12 — 16 ; Rom. x. 11, 12, 13. The ground of acceptance is the one propitiation of Christ ; and, in order to an actual interest in that propitiation, no previous work, no preparatory process, is necessary. All are called, without delay, to believe the testimony of God concerning his Son ; and, in believing it, the blessings of redemption are received. This is language which we understand. We know what it is to receive a testimony



in other cases, and that the effect produced by it always corresponds with its nature ; there can therefore be nothing incomprehensible in the mode of receiving the testimony of Heaven.

I shall now direct your attention to another class of characters. There are some that, upon the whole, rest for acceptance on the work of Christ ; but who, through indistinct and confined views of the Gospel, are yet very much perplexed. Owing to this, *they* also suffer considerable distress of spirit, and, in some measure too, give an unlovely and injurious representation of religion. It is matter of deep regret when any, of whom we have reason to hope well, discover jealousy of more scriptural statements of the truth. It is painful to see them associating with such statements an encouragement to laxness in obedience, and mistaking them for doctrines of another description. Sometimes they are injured by an improper manner of stating the truth, into which mistaken and injudicious friends have occasionally fallen. At other times they are stumbled by the sinful spirit of some professed adherents to such views of the Gospel, who, while they have the word of God in their mouth, are strangers, at least in a great measure, to its sanctifying influence. It were well for such to consider, that stumbling-blocks of a similar nature, occur among those who, in words, are one with themselves. They do not deem this fact an objection against the truth of the Gospel, when urged by an enemy of revelation ; and neither ought objections from similar facts, to be held valid in the other case. Such is the corruption of the human heart, that the most sacred truths are frequently abused. They were so when the apostles preached, and the same evil may be expected now ; but still, where the Gospel is really received, it will be “ the power of God to salvation.” It doubtless becomes Christians to examine the Scriptures with care, to bring every thing to this test, and to abide by the principle, that, as the Spirit sanctifies the soul by the truth, John xvii. 19, so, the more fully its true glory is known, the greater will be



its influence. John viii. 31, 32; 1 Pet. i. 2, 3, 4. Did such but see the truth clearly; did they cordially embrace it in its native simplicity, and cast themselves wholly on the grace and work of the Saviour, their disquietude would cease. When the mind thus reposes on him, he is found to be a "refuge from the storm, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Isaiah xxxii. 2. Then is the suitableness of the Gospel felt, and then do we experience how ample and free is the remedy which it provides. From slavish dread we pass into a state of peace, of confidence, and of hope—God is contemplated as an affectionate Father—the love of Christ is seen, and its constraining power is felt—the law of heaven, the sum of which is love, is written upon the heart—the soul is freed from the influence of this world, and is, in a measure, moulded into conformity to the will of its Lord. Rom. viii. 15; 2 Cor. v. 14; Gal. vi. 14.

In the same way in which the mind is at first changed, must its progressive sanctification be promoted. As in vain we struggle against the evils of our heart while keeping aloof from the Saviour, so, after we have come to Christ, we must continue to live by faith in him; for otherwise there will be a poverty of motives, and our progress will be stopped. When we find, in consequence of this, our exertions fail, we are apt to be discouraged. But, surely it is not difficult to see the cause of our failure. If aware of the claims of the divine law, we must be convinced that it is not the mere knowledge of duty—the mere dread of evil consequences—the vague hope of happiness—or the strength of our vows and resolutions—but more liberal and powerful principles, that can give us the victory over sin. Luke i. 74; 2 Cor. vii. 1; 1 John iv. 19.

Painful means are often necessary to cure us of the strange propensity we feel to depart from the faith of the Gospel, even after we have been "taught of God." The great remedy consists in keeping up the devout



and steady contemplation of the Saviour. It is his cross that enables us to vanquish the world. There we have the confirmation of the fact, that we are by nature children of wrath, and can only be saved through his precious blood. Rom. viii. 3. There we are taught that we are but pilgrims and strangers—that tribulation will assuredly mark our course below—but that fellowship with Christ in his sufferings will be followed by fellowship with him in his glory. Matt. xvi. 21—27; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. To a mind fixed with intensesness and devotion on the cross and sufferings of the Redeemer, earthly things will be stripped of their attractions. By this means “the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world.” From the cross we turn to the crown, and the glories displayed on Calvary are connected with the bright glories of Mount Sion. It is here that a pure and spiritual taste is inspired and maintained. Here the false and bewildering glare of all earthly things is distinctly laid open. No longer do they intoxicate us with delusive joys, or fascinate us with their boasted glories. The heart is attracted to heaven, where the Saviour dwells. Col. iii. 1—4. We feel the power of his resurrection in the confirmation of our faith and our hope; in its imparting to us a heavenly temper; in its supporting, animating, and purifying us under all our trials. Phil. iii. 10.

In contemplating Christ, we fix on a pattern of perfection; for in him we see how the Almighty himself would live; nay, which is more, how he actually did live among men. John xii. 45, and xiv. 9. We cannot equal his comprehensive views of all connected with this and the invisible world; but we see his estimate of both; and, in proportion to our faith in him, and our attachment to him, are we moulded in conformity to his word and character. John xvi. 33, and xiv. 1—3. Our wisdom lies in entering into all his views on every subject; so as to esteem and to despise, to love and to hate, to pursue and to shun, in every case, precisely as he did. 1 John ii. 6; 1 Cor. xi. 1; Rom. xiv. 15;



and xv. 2, 3, 7. Every principle of generosity and of piety ought to influence us to follow him, and to take up his cross; submitting with cheerfulness, when necessary, to the loss of all that is dear to us. As we are saved by free and everlasting love, we must blush at the thought of our rebellion against such goodness, and feel ourselves drawn to walk humbly with our God. Did Jesus live a life of pain and sorrow, of affliction and toil, and can we decline to follow him? Can we deem it too much that the servant should be as the lord? —Far be it. Let our all be given up to him who gave even himself for us. Never let us indulge the unworthy thought, that too much can be resigned for him who for us veiled his glory, and gave his life for our redemption. Small, indeed, must be our greatest returns of gratitude, when compared with the benefits, and with the sacrifices he made to procure them. Say, then, is there not every thing in him to engage the heart, and to fill it with all that can purify and satisfy it?

Allow me, my dear friend, in connection with this, to make a few remarks on the importance of vigilance and circumspection. Since the life of a Christian lies in the divine favour, and in fellowship with heaven, surely every one who feels this must value the blessing, and will be afraid of whatsoever has a tendency to deprive him of it. This fear is quite different from distrust of the goodness or the promise of God. Eph. vi. 10—20; 2 Pet. i. 4—11; 2 Pet. v. 7; connected with verse 8. His goodness appears, not in giving us happiness independently of holiness, but by connecting it with fellowship with himself. Indeed, in no other way, with reverence be it said, can he bless us with true enjoyment. The fear I speak of must be associated with love; for, in proportion as we love God, we must dread his frown, and, of course, avoid whatever would displease him. It is also connected with the enjoyment of happiness in spiritual things; for, the more happy we are in holy pursuits, the more shall we be afraid of whatever would produce carnality of mind. It



springs from a deep conviction of our own weakness and depravity. Experience deepens this conviction ; for often have we found ourselves broken down at what we deemed our strongest point. The feeblest and most trifling temptations have foiled us. Frequently do we find that, from a state of comparative activity and enjoyment in the service of God, we imperceptibly sink into a state of coldness and sloth. Here the recorded failures of the ancient worthies are highly instructive.

Such views of our danger will induce us to trust in the Saviour, to lay firm hold of his promises, and to hold fast the truth as our only hope ; and thus shall we be saved from the fear which hath torment, and be enabled to endure unto the end. Of distrustful fear we have an awful example in the Israelites, who, through unbelief, fell short of the promised inheritance. Heb. iii. and iv. We fall into the same error, when we refuse to take refuge in the favour of God, and in his faithful promise—when we are afraid to place unsuspecting confidence in the sacrifice of Christ—and when we so fear, that we shall not obtain the victory over sin, as to sink into despondency and consequent inactivity. In this case we must be deeply sinning against God ; and, to our own incalculable injury, rejecting the merciful invitations of the Saviour. Such a state of mind will lead, either to a course of self-righteous labour to make our peace with God, or to abandon, in despair, all concern about salvation. From this state of wretchedness the Redeemer came to deliver us. He imparts to us a filial spirit, and, under its influence, we are enabled to “ cleanse ourselves from all kinds of iniquity, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Cor. vii. 1.

It is an error to suppose that self-righteousness is the only evil of which we are in danger ; for depravity operates in a vast variety of ways. From sin of every kind the Lord delivers us by putting his fear in our hearts. Jer. xxxii. 39. We greatly need this ; for, the moment we get self-confident, and our exertions languish, we naturally and rapidly decline into an earthly



spirit. Constant watchfulness, and a perpetual effort against sin, must be kept up. The world is around us and within us, and, to resist it, requires an incessant conflict; for the suspension of the struggle, even one day, will add vigour to our enemy, and weaken our strength. 1 Cor. xvi. 13; 1 Pet. v. 7, 8. The recollection of our sinfulness, and liability to be influenced by objects of sense, together with our feeble principles of resistance, ought to convince us that we have no safety but in wakeful vigilance and constant exertion. Hence, we ought to confide in God, who alone is able to preserve us in all dangers. Confidence in him ought ever to be united with the utmost diligence in the use of the means of sanctification, and with the consideration of every motive that can influence the heart. The Saviour tells us to be of good cheer, for he hath overcome the world. John xvi. 33. He is our shepherd, and never shall we want. He never slumbers nor sleeps. Like the shepherds of Judea, he exercises a nightly, as well as a daily vigilance over his flock. In him, then, let us put our trust, and never let self-confidence for one moment prevail. Thus did David sing of his love and of his care; when, blending with pious feelings of gratitude to the Redeemer the fond recollections of his youth, he gave vent, in the 23d Psalm, to the delightful emotions of his heart.

Forget not that the Spirit of God is promised to all who ask him, and that, through him, the Saviour strengthens us for all things. Luke xi. 13. In the day of trial and of conflict, when you feel your afflictions and evils, recollect that you have a high priest, of the most kind and compassionate character. You are not left alone, so that a sense of weakness need not discourage you. He who hath called his people by his grace will bear with them, meekly and patiently, all the way. Even Moses failed in this, Numb. xi. 15; but our high priest and leader will no more cast us off than "a nursing father" would cast away a child for its crying or frowardness. To raise still higher our views



of his fond affection, it is compared to the warmest attachment "of a mother." Isaiah xlix. 15, 16, and lxvi. 14. He was himself tried, and knows, from experience, what aid and care we need. Much, indeed, there is in us that is fitted to provoke him to cast us off. Our frequent transgressions—the coldness and instability of our hearts—the heavy aggravations of our sins—all tend to illustrate that long-suffering which bears with us notwithstanding. There is not a day but we sin against him; yet he freely forgives, and richly blesses us. What a mercy to have such an advocate with the Father! In looking afresh to his propitiatory blood, that same mercy, which at first relieved us, again flows to us; and, in going to the throne of grace, for all blessings, as the reward of his work, and the fruit of his intercession, we obtain the desire of our hearts. 1 John ii. 1, 2.

I conclude with reminding you, that one great encouragement in the Christian course is the prospect of sharing in the bliss and the glory of the Saviour. Was his spirit cheered amidst all his distress by the bright prospect before him, and shall not the prize set before us animate our hearts? A hope so exalted should induce us to yield ourselves entirely to him, and to purify ourselves because he is pure. 1 John iii. 3. Have we already the earnest of this blessedness; and shall we grieve the Holy Spirit by indulging in sin, and thus deprive ourselves of all true enjoyment? Ephes. iv. 30. Living in the daily and devout contemplation of the things of God, we shall enjoy a happiness which will cure us of attachment to the momentary and delusive pleasures of time, and increase our desire for the pure and the unchanging joys of the world of light. Let that love and holiness, and peace be sought which satisfy the redeemed above; and even now we shall progressively increase in that bliss which shall be enjoyed in perfection in the temple of God.—I am, &c.



clearly seen—its spirit is felt ; and the most sacred and endearing union with God, and with one another, is experienced to be its natural result, in all in whom it dwells. Happiness is found to be proportioned to the degree in which the mind is positively conformed to Jehovah, who is seen to be the perfection of beauty, the source and the centre of all excellence and blessedness.

Were the redeemed in heaven to be told that, by transgressing the divine law, their happiness would be increased ; and that, in being freed from its yoke, their pleasures would be multiplied ; they would be struck with the ignorance which could dictate the suggestion—would, from the heart, pity it—and would at once repel it, with holy indignation, as impious in the extreme. With the utmost energy they would exclaim, that sin was in itself wretchedness, as well as the just cause of the divine indignation. With holy rapture they would declare that obedience and devotion formed the very element of genuine bliss ; and that conformity to the will of God was the very spring of all their exalted and unutterable joys. It were in vain to address to them the language which has sometimes been virtually used on earth, namely, that the love of God, being the love of one who is unchangeable, is, of course, immutable ; and that, therefore, it does not depend on obedience but may be enjoyed independently of it. In this way have many reasoned, and so abused and distorted the Gospel of peace.

The grace of God, however, is very different from capricious fondness. There was nothing, indeed, in us to attract the divine complacency ; but, on the contrary, every thing fitted to excite the divine abhorrence.—Mere wretchedness called forth the pity and the generous compassion of God ; and, influenced by pure commiseration, he gave his Son to be a sin-offering for us.—On him we had no claim ; he loved us, “ because he loved us ;” and in all he was self-moved. But, still, to say that there was no goodness in us to excite the di-



vine sympathy, and to say it was altogether without reason, only so it was, and so it must be, are very different indeed. The grace of God ought not to be viewed as a mere declaration of the divine goodness, on the ground of which we are warranted to say, "God has revealed his love to me—I am the special charge of his Providence—nothing can hurt me—and, of course, I may live as I please, for, do what I may, all shall be well with me at last." Should such a principle govern the mind; instead of being conformed to the divine character, and walking humbly with God, the soul would be the seat of all that is proud and rebellious. Jude 4, 12, 16, 19.

The divine glory and our complete salvation are in the plan of mercy inseparably connected. We cannot, in a proper sense, seek the latter more than the former; for what is salvation but a participation of the divine nature? Heaven is not merely something without us, it is the union of the heart with God; and our happiness is not simply received from his hand, so to speak; it is happiness *in* Him, being the enjoyment of Himself.

It is not a simple declaration of the divine *love* that changes and gladdens the heart. That which renovates and blesses it is the exhibition of the divine love, in connection with all and each of the divine excellencies, which is given in the Gospel.—In the plan of redemption through Christ, there is a manifestation of the divine character, which exalts the whole of the divine perfections, so as to produce in our minds the most full and delightful complacency in the united glories of Jehovah. His love appears in the most dignified form, infinitely removed from every thing like weakness, and associated with all that is venerable. 1 John iii. 1, 5, 6. Here purity, as well as love; justice, as well as mercy; holiness, as well as grace; and truth, as well as goodness, are displayed in all their unsullied glory. Psalm lxxxv. 10—13. This manifestation of love is quite different from that vague view of it to which I have



just referred; and which, whatever flashes of selfish gladness and spurious gratitude it may call forth, can never excite the love of the divine holiness and rectitude, nor command the high esteem and profound veneration of the heart. Never can such a false view of the divine love produce the union of the utmost confidence, and the deepest humility—of the warmest gratitude, and godly fear. There may be a gleam of comfort enjoyed from a persuasion hastily adopted, that sin is forgiven, while there is no sense of the glory of that medium through which the blessing is promised. In such a case, the individual thinks only of safety, and cares not though, in order to the bestowment of pardon, the divine law were relaxed, and the glory of heaven dishonoured. To a genuine Christian, again, the salvation of Christ is endeared, because it is obtained in a way so honourable to the character and government of God.

The mere declaration of the divine benevolence, then, cannot impart genuine happiness—there must, in order to this, be a display of the whole character of God. His grace is not to be viewed as an end to which every thing else is to be made subservient; but, on the contrary, as a means to an end. It must be viewed as it is united in the Gospel, with all of the divine excellencies; and as united with them for the very purpose of bringing the soul back to God, and producing in us corresponding principles. Hosea xi. 4. When this stupendous manifestation of the divine glories is perceived and felt, our spirits come to be in union with the will of God—our souls re-echo the language of his heart—and we sound the praises of his matchless excellencies. We thus know, from experience, that his service is perfect freedom; and that he is the happiest and most honoured worshipper who is most like to the God of salvation. Sin comes to be associated in our minds with the murder of the Son of God—with the compassion of him who did not spare him—and with the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. We are led to seek, not an unde-



finest happiness, but blessedness, resulting from the exercise of those hallowed principles which adorned the character of our best and tried benefactor. We already find it to be our highest bliss below to enjoy a foretaste of this exalted joy. In proportion as we participate in the feelings and the exercises of the man of sorrows, do we grow in meetness for the company of those pure and exalted spirits who encircle the divine throne. Even now we are citizens of the heavenly city; we are members of the great family named of the God and Father of Christ, and have an interest in all their enjoyments. The Gospel has drawn aside the veil which covers the world of glory, and calls upon us, as characters whose citizenship is in heaven, to unite with the heavenly angels, the ancient worthies, and with all the company of heaven, in praising him who sitteth upon the throne, and in adoring the Lamb. Heb. x. 19—22; xii. 22—24. Rev. v. 13. Is this, indeed, our high privilege; and shall we be indifferent to such bliss, and to the pleasures,—the unspeakable pleasures—connected with access into the holiest of all? In the first instance, there must be much of a sense of deliverance and safety in our happiness, and in the spring of our love; for the happiness and the love of creatures in our guilty circumstances, must originate in a sense of the divine goodness. But if genuine, our love to God for his goodness, and our joy in the sense of security, will produce love to him on account of the glory of his character, as displayed in the Gospel, and delight in himself as the spring of our happiness. Psalm lxxiii. 25. The blessings of his grace lead us to their source, and we prize the giver more than his gifts, for the latter come to be valued chiefly as tokens of the love of him who is the supreme object of our delight.

It is in this way that the love of God is revealed in the happiness of man. It is thus that we, who at first were but the objects of pity and compassion, come, by a renovation of mind, to be the objects of complacency. When first we found mercy, we admired the free and



tender compassion of God,—the generous and disinterested love of the Redeemer ; and, while we adored the divine goodness, it was the grief of our hearts that he who had thus pitied and compassionately relieved us, could not view us with complacency, as characters amiable in his sight. The desire of our hearts was, to resemble him who loved us, and gave himself for us. Gratitude excited this desire—admiration and esteem excited it. The question was put, “ How shall I express the feeling of my heart for mercies so great, and still flowing towards me ? ” In reply, we were directed to the precepts of the Saviour : These enjoin nothing but what he himself exemplified. Obedience to them is the same as conformity to his character. The grateful and holy desires of the heart are thus met and satisfied. In proportion as these sacred principles are cherished, is the service of Christ found to be its own reward. The mind is not satisfied with the forgiveness of sin and the hope of heaven, but it pants after bliss, in conformity to the will and character of the Saviour : Indeed, no mind that is not fixed on spiritual things as its nourishment can be happy. How delightfully does David, in the 119th Psalm, sing of his blessedness in studying and keeping the law of his God. In his eyes, not all the boasted wealth and grandeur of the world was once to be compared with this. Never let the sophistry of a foolish heart and a vain world, beguile us out of this happiness. Let every faculty be roused into exertion ; and let our desire and our aim be, that every revolving day of this fleeting scene may exhibit our growing conformity to the will of our Lord. Let his transforming character engage our hearts ; and, in each successive period here, let it inscribe on us a new feature of the heavenly worshippers, who see his glory, and are assimilated to him. It is thus that we shall attain the great object of our ambition, which is full conformity to the Redeemer ; and that we shall attract the full complacency of his heart.

Delight in being the objects of his approbation and



complacency, is far from being a self-righteous satisfaction : It is the delight of one who, having had much forgiven, loves much : It is the happiness of a heart anxious to express gratitude and esteem, and transported in having had an opportunity of giving vent to its emotions, in ways which meet the wishes and the taste of the much loved and respected benefactor : It is the bliss of a mind, fired by love for excellence, and happy in being in some measure assimilated to its glory : It is the transport of one who, while he rests his all for eternity on the cross of Christ, listens to the precious promise of the everlasting covenant, " I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts," Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. viii. 10 ; and trusts not in his own strength, but in the grace of God. Such a character sees and rejoices that the great design of God, in redeeming the guilty from the curse, is to conform them to himself ; and so to bless them with that exalted and hallowed enjoyment which results from fellowship with him.

The justification of Abraham was an instance of free mercy, and of pure compassion ; but his blessedness advanced as he became " the friend of God : " It was in that likeness to God—that union of heart with him—that sweet fellowship with him—that entire confidence in him, which so eminently distinguished him—and in that complacency and delightful approbation with which Jehovah himself regarded him, that his blessedness was completed ; James ii. 22, 23. 2 Chron. xx. 7. Isaiah xli. 8. The divine love to Christians is still, in the first instance, pure compassion ; but the great object of the divine pity is, that they may be brought to happiness in the enjoyment of holy fellowship with God. The stupendous display of the divine perfections in the cross of Christ has all the force of a pattern to guide, and a motive to inspire. With this in our eye, obedience becomes easy. We do not dread merely the consequences of sin ; we hate it, and revolt from it, as combining all that is base—all that is opposed to worth—and all that



is incompatible with the feelings of gratitude and affection. This raises us above the fear of man ; endears to us the love of the Saviour ; cherishes the love of him ; in the heart ; and assimilates us to the glorious character of God. When illuminated by the brightness of this glory, a spiritual taste is acquired—divine things are relished—they are experienced to be in themselves truly good and satisfying : they are felt to be the source of delightful rest ; and all of them being traced to God, fellowship with him is ardently sought, and carefully kept up. Rom. vi. 21, 22.

The revelation of the divine glory is the medicine, the virtue of which is made manifest, in its conquest of the corrupt inclinations of the heart ; in its curing the disorders in the affections ; subduing the hostility of the mind to God ; and bringing our whole nature into subjection to his will. When this influence predominates (alas ! that it so little does so,) it attracts the heart of the sinner to the Saviour—it charms his soul—it wins his affections—and becomes a bond of union the most endearing, and the most firm. The mind becomes assimilated to its Lord, who fills every heart in which he dwells, with the very spirit and disposition of heaven. This work, indeed, is very imperfect here ; but it will be perfected hereafter. Even now, it is proportioned to the measure of our faith.

We accordingly see a very high degree of it in the ancient worthies, and in the primitive Christians. Psalm xlii. 1, 2 ; xliii. 3, 4 ; lxiii. 1—8. Phil. iii. 7—14, 20, 21. Rom. viii. 18, 35—39. 1 Peter i. 6—9. Time would fail, were I to attempt to point you to the many passages of Scripture, in which we are furnished with examples of the power of the Gospel. Now, the divine word is the same to us that it was to those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises. We have the same Saviour ; his love is as warm now as when he suffered on the tree ; his promises are immutable ; his grace cannot fail ; and his mercy endureth for ever. We have the same free access to the throne of grace that



was granted to them ; and we are assured, that whatsoever we ask, in the name of Christ we shall receive.

With these privileges before us, let us, my dear friend, think of the multitudes already before the throne, who have been brought "out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Rev. vii. 13—17. Let us contemplate the faith and patience of the approved servants of God, of whom a great cloud is exhibited to us in Scripture. This is not inconsistent with the constant contemplation of the Saviour, for the Scriptures have united the consideration of his character with that of his people. Heb. xii. 1, 2. Their example will serve to encourage us to form our character on his ; for their success manifests the practicability of a considerable degree of likeness to it, and is fitted to excite us to emulate those who derived all their excellence from that very grace which is freely exhibited to ourselves. There are but few that attain the height at which they aim, and hence men, in every case, ought to take a high standard. It will be well for us to study the characters of those who have been most distinguished lights in the church of Christ. Let us also study the excellencies of the most eminent of our departed Christian friends, and the most consistent living characters. There are numbers who, though upon the whole truly religious, can hardly be taken as examples : There are others who seem as if they lived on the borders of the two kingdoms—the kingdom of Christ, and that of Satan. They seek to unite the service of God with that of Mammon—an attempt at once vain and criminal. There are not a few of sweet dispositions, amiable tempers, and benevolent deportment, who are strangers to the power of religion. Its forms they observe ; they are willing to converse on it ; they do so with a degree of seriousness, and cannot be said to have violent prejudices against it ; while yet they have not, in truth, been imbued with its spirit. Such we ought to treat with the greatest kindness and affection, manifesting towards them the meekness and gentleness of Christ. They



are not, however, patterns for our imitation. In certain respects, indeed, they may,—for not seldom do such act a part which may put some who are genuine Christians, but possessed of what is termed a bad natural temper, very much to the blush. Besides, whatever in any person is in itself good and praise-worthy, ought to be imitated. Phil. iv. 8. But I speak of the duty of taking for our pattern, those who are, or were, the most distinguished for excellence—the brightest examples of piety—persons by whom we may be elevated to a more devotional spirit—a more heavenly state of mind—and a more holy conversation. Heb. xii. 1. and vi. 12; xiii. 7. 2 Cor. viii. 8. We stand in need of every excitement which can be had in the stimulating influence of fervent piety, and active exertion—in the instructive and edifying example of a spiritual mind—and in the consoling and animating display of patient and happy suffering. Such characters shed a light on our path to glory.

It is our happiness to have many such set before us in Scripture; and in following them we cannot be misled, because their character stands approved of Heaven. But in as far as others now resemble them, and in as far as our departed friends and relatives were like to them, we are called to imitate them also. The emulations to be cultivated among Christians are altogether different from the unlovely rivalries which obtain in the world. It is for us to aim at being like in real excellence to those who have finished their course, and to strive who shall be most like those whose characters now most exemplify the character of Christ. The men of the world dwell upon great earthly characters, to resemble whom they propose as their highest ambition. Christians ought to learn from this, and so hallow the principles which others abuse or carry not to their proper objects. If the irreligious avail themselves of the numbers who wage war with God, to harden their hearts and stifle the voice of conscience; shall not we be animated by the example of the many who have been the warm and the devoted servants of the Saviour? Let their zeal



and their activity put us to the blush, cause us to shake off sloth, and with renewed ardour to follow the Redeemer. When we think of the departed, shall we not bless God on their behalf? While we recollect their death, and stand by their graves, let us seek to participate in their triumph, and to unite in their song. They served God here, and now they are with him. They and we are not parted for ever. When we bade them farewell, and they replied in the same accents, it was not bidding each other an eternal adieu—it was in the delightful hope of meeting again where no farewells are known—where the pang of separation shall never be felt. Now, it is by following them “in faith and in patience,” that this hope is realized.

This spirit of imitation accords with the tenor of revelation; in which we are taught, not by words only, but in a particular manner by actions and events. There is not a temper, disposition, or action, required in Scripture, that is not realized before us in the history of the saints. The whole is seen in one view in the wondrous character of Christ. Here there is no flaw—no danger of mistaking a failing for an excellence, or evil for good. It is only so far as others resemble him that they are to be imitated. Such is human nature, that we need, and are greatly profited by, the example of fellow-creatures; but the Saviour claims our special attention, and with him all others should be compared. Indeed, one great benefit derived from the example of fellow-Christians arises from the opportunity and means it affords us of comparing the Saviour with them, and so bringing him more directly before us, and impressing his character more upon our hearts. He is himself, then, the great pattern of all excellence; and he it is whom we ought steadily and constantly to follow. To him obedience, at once implicit and enlightened, may be yielded. In him we see every excellence, both in doing and in suffering—every holy temper and disposition—every deed of piety and benevolence,—all flowing from the most sacred and ex-



alted love to God, and the warmest love to man. His mind ever rises above the present scene : There is a constant abstraction and elevation of soul marking the most heavenly temper of heart. In a word, from first to last—throughout the whole of his trying course of sorrow and exertion, and eminently at the final consummation of his woes—he was all that he taught.

This is our model : To this character it is the wise and gracious appointment of our Father that we should be conformed. Rom. viii. 29. Phil. ii. 5. 1 John iii. 3. It is not mere freedom from flagrant sin, nor even a life irreproachable in the eyes of mankind, that constitutes conformity to the Saviour. Even should this be accompanied by many amiable and beneficial qualities, and much that is in itself good and praiseworthy ; still, if we have nothing more, we shall fall short of exemplifying the character of him in whom God delighteth. To be like to him, it behoves us to copy his whole character—to imbibe his principles and views—to judge as he did of God, of the divine law, of sin and holiness, of this world and that which is to come, of the true dignity and happiness of man, and of the whole plan of redemption : To be like him is to feel that God is in the right, and that we are in the wrong ; and that had he left us to our desert, we had righteously perished in our sins : It is to imitate him in his love to God, his zeal for his glory, his attachment to his cause, his readiness to do and to suffer whatever he required, and to feel with him that the loss of the divine favour is the ruin of happiness : It is to imitate him in his love to his bitterest enemies, and in his patient and meek resignation in the midst of the heaviest pains, injuries, and reproaches : It is to copy his generous disregard of personal ease and enjoyment, and his constant kindness to others, even while he himself was in a paroxysm of distress. It is like him to be determined and firm in adhering to truth, and persevering in the path of duty, however great and many the difficulties which we may have to encounter : It appears in hum-



bly and gratefully acquiescing in the plan of redemption through his blood ; and in glorying in it as an exhibition of the divine character, which reflects the highest honour on God, while it provides for the salvation of sinners : In a word, it is like him to be of one mind with God ; and so to drink at the fountain-head of enjoyment—to participate in the blessedness of the Almighty himself, and to have every power of the soul transformed into his likeness. Say, then, are not conformity to the Redeemer and genuine happiness inseparably connected ? Are they not in many respects the very same thing ?

I shall refer you, my dear friend, once more to the important consideration, that it is not the mere declaration of the divine benevolence that is the cause of happiness. Happiness is imparted not merely by securing the sinner from danger, but by renovating his mind, and imbuing it with the sacred principles of the Saviour's character. The joy of a Christian is not that of a rebel, who, through the weakness, the partiality, or the mistaken affection of his king, has obtained a pardon and escaped punishment ; and who, having got beyond the reach of his prince, can in security add, without fear, one act of continued rebellion to another. Far be it. It is the happiness of a rebel, who not only has been freely pardoned, but is cordially reconciled to his kind and righteous sovereign ; who is brought to see the enormity of his crimes—is deeply humbled, and filled with heart-felt contrition because of them ; and who, while he bitterly repents of his folly, and is ashamed of his baseness and ingratitude, possesses peace which passeth understanding ; and so is overcome by the wondrous and free favour of his much injured prince. 1 Tim. i. 12—14. Acts xx. 24. xxi. 13. and xxvi. 19, 20, 22, 23. Gal. ii. 20. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. Such a character admires that medium through which he can confide in his sovereign as a father, and approach him with freedom. Though forgiven of his king, he cannot forgive himself : His mind is in



union with the will of his Lord ; and his heart is melted and subdued by that unmerited kindness and grace, which, in the work of propitiation, are joined with the most sacred regard to principle and excellence : His heart is anxious to be found in the path of duty and obedience, that he may at once express his love, gratitude, and esteem ; and enjoy that happiness which he now sees to be inseparably connected with conscientiously keeping his place as a subject.

Such is the medicinal effect of that display of the divine character which is made in the Gospel. For the very purpose of thus curing our spiritual maladies, was the love of Heaven thus wondrously manifested. The doctrine of justification by faith is the moral means of effecting our conformity to the holy and spiritual character of God,—or, in other words, our sanctification. The man who abuses the doctrine of divine grace, by making it an encouragement to sin, is totally a stranger to its true nature. 1 John i. 6, 7. Jude 1, 4. Rom. iii. 8. and vi. 1, 2. What he calls the grace of God is quite a different thing from what the Scriptures mean by it. But though the truth be thus perverted and abused, never let us become suspicious of it. Still it is the power of God to salvation, because it exhibits the only effectual motives to holiness, and the only efficient means of implanting and cherishing all spiritual tempers and dispositions. Rom. i. 16, 17. 1 Cor. i. 18, 23, 24. That which it aims at, is not the mere exterior decency and correctness of deportment which is often put for the whole of morality, and is the summit of mere human attainments : Its object is to subject the whole man to God, and to assimilate his nature to the divine. 2 Pet. i. 4.

Surely, when we contemplate the character of the Friend of sinners—when we listen to him as, from his cross, he beseeches us to abandon sin, as the ruin of our happiness—when we hear him entreating us to consider his many and complicated woes, and learn from them the evil and the tremendous consequences of transgres-



sion—when we turn to his glory, and see the source of his present blessedness—when we hear the applauding voice of his Father, and then hearken to his gracious invitations and earnest entreaties to come and freely partake of the blessings of salvation ; we must feel impelled by an influence, at once sweet and commanding, to forsake all and follow him.

May your mind ever be imbued with the high and hallowed principles of the Saviour, and ever feel their elevating and purifying influence.

I remain, &c.

## LETTER IX.

### ON THE PERSEVERANCE OF CHRISTIANS.

The perseverance of believers, a doctrine of Scripture—The abuse of the doctrine noticed—The design, and the proper use of it—Unscriptural views that have been taken of it—Is illustrated by what happened on Paul's voyage to Rome—The nature of filial fear, as connected with it—The danger of presumption—The use of Scripture examples of declension—The connection in which the doctrine is taught in Scripture—Perseverance, not simply the connection of two distinct things, but a continuance in a particular course—The necessity of connecting the means and the end exemplified by the Apostles—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I RECEIVED your letter ; and shall now, agreeably to your request, write you some remarks on the subject of the final perseverance of Christians. This is a doctrine of great importance ; and mistakes regarding it have occasioned no small perplexity to many. Without farther preamble, I beg your attention to the express promise of the Saviour, that such as believe in him shall never finally perish. “ My sheep,” says he, “ know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall ne-



ver perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Now, faith in Christ, considered in a general view, includes faith in his promises, as well as in his sacrifice. You will perceive that this promise is one of the first importance; and that confidence in it, as well as in his atonement, is the duty and the privilege of his people. The Apostle Paul accordingly comforts the Christians at Corinth by the consideration, that "God would confirm them to the end, that they might be blameless in the day of Christ;" or, in other words, would preserve them in the faith and obedience of the truth. He expresses his confidence in the Philippians, on the evidence of their patience and Christian diligence, as believers of the Gospel; and his happiness that he, who, of his sovereign love, and for his own glory, "had begun in them the good work, would perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ." Peter likewise addresses Christians as children, "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." John x. 27, 28. 2 Cor. i. 8. Phil. i. 6. 1 Peter i. 5. These, and such like passages of Scripture, declare that what God has of his free favour begun in believers, he will preserve and finish: They include a promise, that he will richly impart to them the gracious influence of his Spirit, to subdue the evils of the heart, to keep them from falling, and to secure their everlasting bliss.

The intercession of Christ, on the night in which he was betrayed, includes a prayer, that "all who believe the word of the Apostles" may become partakers of that blessed union, in Judgment, affection, and pursuit, which subsists between the Father and the Son—a prayer that his people may be kept in the name of his Father, or in the faith of the divine character, as revealed in the Gospel,—a prayer for their complete sanctification through the truth,—and a prayer for their final glorification in the heavenly temple. Now, his intercession is always prevalent; and, if so, Christians must participate in all for which he prays in their behalf. Precious is the privilege of such an advocate.



I am aware that this doctrine has been abused ; but there is a wide difference between a doctrine which in itself, and from its very nature, is calculated to do harm, and one which is only the occasion of injury in consequence of being abused by the depraved principles of man. When misunderstood, or perverted, it is in fact made a new doctrine, essentially different from what it is in reality. You will perceive that, in such a case, it is not the doctrine in its true nature that does harm, but as distorted and completely changed. There is not a doctrine in Scripture which has not been more or less abused by the hypocrite or the licentious : but are we on this account to give them up ? Far be it. Let us rather study more closely their native glory, and great design, as exhibited in the Gospel ; and hold them fast, as of practical and salutary use.

I wish you, my dear friend, particularly to consider that the doctrine in question is designed to animate and encourage the heart to cleave to the Redeemer ; to continue in the faith and hope of the truth, Jude 20, 21, 24, 25 ; to endure afflictions and persecution with patience, 2 Tim. i. 12 ; and to wait, in the exercise of Christian obedience, for the coming of our Lord. Heb. vi. 11—20. In our journey heavenward we have to encounter many enemies and difficulties ; but we are assured that our Lord will be with us to watch over, to guide, and to defend us—that he will provide for us all that we need,—and that he will secure our admission to the heavenly temple at the end of our course. What so animating to the Christian soldier as the promise of a final and decisive victory ? Such a promise, you will easily see, can only be designed to encourage the hearts of the faithful ; and what, then, can a traitor have to do with it ? The persuasion that the aid of Heaven will be abundantly and seasonably afforded, is well fitted to raise us above the fear of man, and of all opposition ; because it leads us to repose in the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of him who hath said, that he will never leave us nor forsake us. 2 Tim. iv.



18. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. The promises, threatenings, and exhortations of the word of God are intended to be powerful means of guarding against apostacy, and stimulating to that perseverance to which they relate. We are not, and cannot be compelled to persevere ; but, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, the word of God excites us to continue to the end, in the hope of eternal life. In the midst of all your fears, then, look to him who hath promised to be with you ; and take encouragement from the grace and the faithfulness of his character. Be animated by his word to be diligent in obedience, and to meet with humble boldness the difficulties of your course. Remember that, when the Israelites heard of walled cities and of giants in the land of promise, they sinned in not looking simply to the promise of their God, and so giving way to the most distrustful and desponding fears. Numb. xiii. 26—29, 31—33. and xiv. 1—4. It was for them to turn from all the difficulties of which they heard (even granting all of them to exist) to the contemplation of the power, the truth, and the goodness of the God of Abraham, who had pledged his word, yea his oath, that his seed should inherit Canaan. Caleb and Joshua were men of another spirit : Their language was expressive of that confidence in God which destroys all tormenting fear of opposition, and stimulates to exertion. Numb. xiii. 30. and xiv. 6—9. Whatever leads us to simplicity of reliance on the Saviour, has indeed been blessed to us. It becomes us to learn from all events ; and to seek that every thing may cause us to cling with greater earnestness to him who loved us, and gave himself for us.

However much you may feel afraid in consequence of the frequent risings of corruption within, and from afflictions and temptations from without, ever commit yourself to the power, the faithfulness, and the abundant grace of the Redeemer. Whatever awe may strike you as you think of death, judgment and eternity, cleave with greater firmness to the finished work of



Christ ; and rest upon it your all. In living by faith in his atonement, you will find that the delightful persuasion of his ability and willingness to keep that committed to him against that day, and the conviction that your labour in his work “ shall not be in vain,” instead of leading you to indulge in sloth, will stimulate you to abound in all holy and self-denying exertions. In contemplating the immutability of the love of God, and reflecting on the delightful fact that he hath pledged his being and perfections for our safety and our bliss, you will find your love to him powerfully excited, and your heart bound by every tie to be his wholly and for ever. Never forget that salvation must be traced to the free grace of God, and must be carried on and perfected by it. Were it either begun or maintained by the unaided efforts of man, it were indeed a hopeless and a heartless work. Despair in that case were certainly the natural effect of a proper view of our character and danger. But blessed be God that the work is his own. Would it not be to the dishonour of his name, were he to fail in the performance of his promise, or in the execution of his plan ? The salvation of his people is an object ever before him : On the accomplishment of it he is ever intent ; and never can he cease to carry it forward to perfection.

I have adverted to the abuse of this doctrine ; and shall now beg your attention to some very unscriptural views which have been given of it. Men have virtually been taught, that such as have at any time had reason to think themselves Christians, will continue to enjoy all the blessings of redemption, independently of their continuing in the faith and the obedience of the Gospel. Hence numbers have been led to say, that they “ shall have peace though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts.” Among professors of religion, there lurks much of this unhallowed spirit. It proceeds upon the principle, that pardon is the great thing in salvation ; and that deliverance from hell is the sum of redemption. Such sentiments are most unwarrantable



and dangerous. Eternal life is never represented in Scripture as merely a future blessing. It is enjoyed even in the present state; and in the discourses of Christ, the promise of it precedes that of a blessed resurrection. "This is," says he, "the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him may *have everlasting life*; and I will raise him up at the last day," And again, "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood *hath eternal life*; and I will raise him up at the last day." John, vi. 40, 54. The great thing meant by salvation in Scripture, is deliverance from sin itself, and restoration to the image of God. Instead of occupying but a subordinate place, this forms the very highest part of redemption. It is the ultimate end; and the doctrine of justification by grace forms the moral means towards the attainment of this consummation.

The error I now refer to is most flattering to the human mind. From a natural unwillingness to give up the hope of happiness in heaven, men are easily induced, even when there is nothing in their present dispositions or deportment in accordance with the will of God, to look for relief to what they have formerly felt. They endeavour to persuade themselves that they were then in a state of acceptance with God; and that, therefore, according to their views of the doctrine of perseverance, they never can perish,—even should they at present be slothful, and indulging in sin. Now, this is manifestly absurd in itself, as well as at variance with Scripture. What is salvation ~~but~~ the deliverance of the soul from sin? and how then can a person be a partaker of it while under the government of iniquity? The thing is utterly impossible. It is like saying that a man is in health who is at the very moment the subject of a mortal malady.

The error of which I now speak, is the very evil against which we are warned in the solemn admonitions contained in the tenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. We are there admonished not to trust in



past attainments and enjoyments, even granting them to be genuine ; and are taught that any use made of the doctrine in question, besides that of an encouragement to continued and self-denying obedience, is not faith in God, but unfounded presumption. The Saviour hath said, that his people shall not perish ; but they are preserved by his power *through*, and not independently of faith. 1 Peter i. 5. They persevere by his not permitting "their faith to fail." Luke xxii. 32. The promise is not, that such as believe once, or for a time only, shall be saved. On the contrary, while it is declared that "the just shall live by faith," it is also said, "but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him," Heb. x. 38. *Just* here means justified, as is evident from the application of the passage to the doctrine of justification, Rom. i. 17. Gal. iii. 11, 12 ; and the meaning is, that the justified are such only as believe ; and, farther, that as they are justified by faith without works at first, so they continue to enjoy life, by continuing under the influence of faith as the ruling principle of their hearts. The life which they live is "by the faith of the Son of God," Gal. ii. 20. or, in other words, they "believe," that is, they continue to believe, "to the salvation of the soul." A life of faith is a habit and not something merely transient. And it is connected with the enjoyment of life or blessedness in its highest sense. This accordingly is set in opposition to drawing "back unto perdition." If Christians were to cease to believe and to be influenced by the Gospel, they certainly would perish ; and when they do in a measure leave the truth and depart from God, they are in the way which, in itself, leads to destruction ; for the object and the tendency of sin, in them as well as in others, is to drown them in perdition. This arises not from the mere will of God, but from the nature of things. The very essence of spiritual life lies in the love of God, and from this all true happiness springs ; so that, if the mind is estranged from God, the blessings of salvation cannot be enjoyed. To be carnally



mind is, in itself, death ; for under the power of sin there can be no bliss here ; and it is the cause of, that misery which shall afflict the finally condemned. The reason why sin does not terminate in destruction in the case of Christians, is not that it is different in its nature or tendency in them from what it is in others, but that a timely stop is put to its progress by repentance. Hence the exhortation, "Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died," Rom. xiv. 15 ; and the declaration, "Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish," 1 Cor. viii. 11. The conduct blamed will cause our brother to stumble, or, in other words, to do what his conscience condemns. This, on reflection, will be the cause of grief to him,—and perhaps to such a degree, that, in the language of Solomon respecting heaviness of heart, he may be "ready to perish." This conduct to him is calculated also to destroy the principle of piety in his heart ; for the tendency of sin is towards apostasy. That it does not issue in this, is not owing to the nature of what our brother through us has been induced to do, but to the grace of God. It follows, that we are as criminal in endangering his soul, by leading him to do what has a tendency to destroy him, as though he actually perished. Our conduct must be judged of by its natural effect, and not by the preventing energy of divine grace.

You will see from this, that the faith, or conviction, of their danger in letting the truth slip, and in declining from God, is conducive to the safety of Christians, as much as is their persuasion of their security in abiding in Christ. God fulfils his promises by "putting his fear in our hearts, that so we may not turn away from him," Jer. xxxii. 40. The means and the end are thus connected.

I shall endeavour to illustrate this by a reference to what happened to Paul on his voyage to Rome. He had the express promise of God that he and all in the ship should be preserved ; and yet, when the seamen were about to leave the vessel, he said, that except the



mariners remained on board "they could not be saved," Acts xxvii. 21—31. Now, did this imply any doubt of the divine promise? Far from it. He knew that the promise was to be fulfilled, not without, but by means of the seamen,—and, believing this, he insisted on their being kept in the vessel. The persuasion that there was danger if they left the ship, was not inconsistent with faith in the promise; because it was not a promise that, happen what might, they should be preserved; but that, through the exertions of the seamen, they should be saved. It may be said, "had Paul and the others perished, the promise had failed;" but it may on the same principle be affirmed that, had the Apostle and they been saved without the aid of the mariners, the purpose of God had failed, because it was just as much his purpose to save them by means of the seamen as it was his purpose to save them at all. If they had faith in this—that by the aid of the mariners they were to be preserved—it is evident that this belief, instead of making them say, "We need not mind the use of means," must have had the very opposite effect. They would be encouraged, on the one hand, to use the means, because they had the assurance of success; and, on the other, they would be kept from neglecting them, because they knew that without them they could not be saved. 2 Kings xx. 5, 6. compared with verse 7.

Let me ask you, then, to apply this to the present subject. It is the promise of God that they who abide in Christ, by continuing in the faith of the Gospel, shall certainly be saved. If they were saved without continuing in the Saviour, the purpose of God were disannulled, exactly as in the case of the Apostle and the seamen. It is with them as it was with the generation of the Israelites that left Egypt. The promise to them of the land of Canaan, was connected with their believing God. This is evident from the reasons assigned for their coming short of it; which are thus summed up by the Apostle, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief," Heb. iii. 19.



The promise, then, had not failed, for God had not said that he should give them the land at any rate, but only in the way of their believing in his power, faithfulness, and goodness. In like manner, the confidence of Christians is not a persuasion that they shall be saved *at all events*, but that they shall be so in the way of "continuing in the faith, and being unmoved from the hope of the Gospel," Col. i. 23. Hence the exhortation, "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God," Heb. iii. 12. Confident trust in the promise of safety in abiding in Christ, and a conviction that we must perish if we depart from him, will lead us to take refuge in the grace of God, and to place our dependence on the finished work of the Redeemer,—even when we see most clearly, and feel most deeply, our guilt and our demerit. This is illustrated by the case of a manslayer who had fled to a city of refuge, Numb. xxxv. 25—28. He knew that, while there, he was safe, and this would give him joy. But it would not banish the fear of danger if he left the place of refuge. His apprehension of danger, therefore, would keep him in the city to which he had fled, till the death of the high-priest, because till then he was not in safety any where else.

While we thus believe the promise of safety in continuing in the truth, we shall feel jealous of ourselves, because conscious that there is much within us that is opposed to a life of faith in the Son of God, and that we are ever prone to depart from the very source of our mercies. The dread of being deceived is one of our chief guards against unbelief and self-deceit. And if God has said to us "be not deceived," it cannot be wrong in us to watch against every species of deception. There is no inconsistency between this and confidence in the word and the grace of God. The very experience of the mutability and deceitfulness of our hearts will impel us to keep firm hold of the testimony of Heaven, and to trust in the arm of omnipotence. When the fear arising from a sense of the deceitfulness of our



hearts produces despondency and distrust, we have fallen into the sin of the Israelites, when, from the dread of the inhabitants, they refused to go up to the conquest of Canaan : But when this fear causes us to cleave the more closely to the Saviour, and cling with the greater eagerness to that truth which saves the sinner, we derive much benefit from the humbling conviction of our depravity. Despair of success will keep us from the use of means, because the use of them is not expected to be of service ; while, on the other hand, presumption will keep us from the use of them, because we deem them unnecessary. Thus, though these two in many things differ, they in some respects perfectly accord. Hence the importance of blending a holy fear and jealousy of ourselves, with confidence and hope in God.

I need not say that the fear I speak of is not that which arises from distrusting the promises of Heaven : It is the fear of letting the divine word slip out of our hearts ; and proceeds from a deep sense of the evil principles which lurk in our breasts, and the consequent danger of our giving way to temptation. Connected with it is a spirit of watchfulness and caution, against all from without and from within, that would mar our enjoyment, and lead to transgression : It includes the fear of indulging in sin, as incompatible with fellowship with God here, and the hope of enjoying him hereafter ; and springs from delight in his favour, and from a supreme desire of communion with him as the chief joy of the soul. This may be explained by the principle of self-preservation, which, in regard to natural life, is of the highest importance. The love of life impels us to avoid every thing that endangers it. Now, spiritual life lies in the divine favour, and in holy likeness to God ; and all who enjoy it are impressed with its importance, and jealous of every thing which would rob them of the comfortable sense of it now, and the full enjoyment of it hereafter. As, when we see bodily danger, the instinct of self-preservation is at once called forth, and exerts itself in avoiding or averting it ; so



the fear of which I now speak operates instinctively in the hour of peril ; and is proportioned to the degree in which we abound in the love of God, in reverence for his will, and in attachment to heavenly things. This principle, in substance, existed in our innocent first parents, and was addressed in the threatening of death, Gen. ii. 17 ; and therefore ought not to be condemned as criminal, or as inconsistent with Christian confidence ; but cherished as the means by which God keeps us from departing from him to sin and to vanity. Peace in the first instance is derived simply from the Gospel before there has been time or opportunity for bringing forth its fruit, but to maintain peace while habitually living in sin is very unwarrantable. We may fairly adduce the evils of the habitual sinner as evidences that whatever he may think or profess, he is not believing the Gospel of God, but something very different from it, though called by its name. 1 John i. 6 ; iv. 20.

The grace of God appears, not in placing us where no enemy can assault us, but in making us, feeble as we are, " more than conquerors." In some respects he subdues our enemies by his immediate interposition ; but in others, he does so by strengthening us to obtain the victory. The great adversary was bruised on Calvary, but he is destined to be so *under our feet* likewise. Rom. xvi. 20. And this manner of effecting our deliverance is more strikingly illustrative of his power and goodness than if our agency were utterly excluded. The very captives of Satan, and the deluded votaries of sin and of the world, are, through divine grace, made the means of utterly defeating them. Never, then, let us think of laying aside our armour, either from distrustful despondency or vain confidence ; but, trusting in our leader, let us keep the field. If the flock of Christ are in no danger, there is no need for the vigilance and the power which the Scriptures ascribe to him. As the Captain of Salvation, he were in that case far from entitled to the praise of conduct-



ing his redeemed through manifold perils to the realms of bliss ; and the union of confidence in him with unremitting activity, were no part of the Christian character. How unworthy of him, and injurious to us, are such notions !

• When professors of religion begin to think that sin cannot hurt them—that their relation to God as his children, their experience of his love in time past, and their high privileges, render sin less dangerous to them than to others, there is much reason for alarm. When they imagine, that, though they may suffer some degree of correction in this life, yet, as all their transgressions, past, present, and future, are forgiven, they need not feel as if they could expose them to the wrath to come,—they are in the utmost danger of losing proper views of sin, and of indulging in indifference and hardness of heart. Characters who reason thus, often abuse what is related of the falls of the people of God ; as if, because individuals of eminence among them went far astray and were reclaimed, we were not under any great necessity of keeping strictly by the narrow way to life. Such narratives, it ought to be remembered, are designed to answer two salutary purposes : The first is, to warn us that we are in constant danger of departing from God, whatever may be our attainments ; and so to excite a spirit of self-diffidence, humility, and vigilance, to induce us to continue in close fellowship with God, and to keep us in the use of those means which are appointed for our preservation : The second is, that, in case we should have backslidden from him, we may be kept from sinking into utter despair ; that, if we have stumbled, we may not continue on the ground, and spend our time in lamenting our fall, without looking to him who can raise us up, restore our souls, and cause us to “ walk in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Ps. xxiii. 3. Rev. ii. 5. In a word, that “ we may repent, and do our first works.” We are told accordingly, not only of the falls of such as feared God, but also of their bitter grief and great



alarm ; of the divine displeasure with them ; and of their restoration through renewed faith and repentance. If David was not bruised and fractured by his fall, why does he pray " make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." If not filled with a dread of divine abandonment, why does he say, " Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." If he had not lost the consolations of God, why does he say, " Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." If he had not been struck dumb, why does he say, " Open thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth thy praise." Ps. li. 8, 11, 12, 15. Never then let it be said that sin cannot hurt a believer : " The thing that David had done displeased the Lord." 2 Sam. xii. 27.

When a person says, " there is no telling how far people may go astray and yet be Christians," he takes a most ruinous view of the divine word. The Scripture may be compared to a laboratory, containing a great variety of medicines, but the use of which requires great skill ; as, however useful some of them may be in certain cases, they might be hurtful in others. When a Christian is surrounded with temptations, and begins to fear that he shall be overcome, let him turn to the promises of aid and of preservation, and be encouraged by them, not to be idle, but to continue the conflict in the hope of victory. When, again, he loses his first love, and sinks into self-indulgence and sin, let him listen to the many solemn warnings against declension and apostacy, and be roused by the threatenings of the divine word to " remember whence he has fallen, and to repent, and do his first works." If in the latter case he shall look to the promises of preservation, and make them a pillow for his sloth, he is on ground the most dangerous, and has gone far, very far, from God. The salutary effect produced by the promises on a mind influenced by the truth, is impaired in a backslider by sinful indulgence. His fears need to



be alarmed, and his vigilance<sup>\*</sup> revived, by the solemn warnings and awful threatenings of Scripture. The Scriptures do not warrant him to say, that a person may go this and the other length, and yet be a Christian: They never answer such questions as this, "How far may I go in conformity to what is not right, and yet have the root of the matter within me?" They do not attempt, on the other hand, to mark out exactly how far men may go in religion, and yet come short of future glory. Such questions they do not particularly answer, that we may learn not to presume on past sensations and enjoyments, but may be led to "watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation."

Consider, in connection with this, the address of our Lord to his disciples,—in which even his particular friends are roused to a sense of personal danger. He called upon them, as well as the unenlightened multitudes around him, "not to be afraid of them that could kill only the body, but to fear him who could cast both soul and body into hell." Luke xxii. 4, 5. He declared "that whosoever was ashamed of him, or of his words, should be disowned of him at his second coming." Mark viii. 38. And he has also taught them, that the unwatchful and unfaithful servant should be condemned by him at last. Matt. xxiv. 48—51. He knew the temptations which were before them, and the natural desires of the heart, by which they might be induced to deny him. Against this danger he not only exhibits to their view the prospect of being acknowledged by him at last, but the prospect also, that, by denying him, they should incur the misery of being disowned by him. See also the language of the Apostles, who, while they exhibit the blessings of the Gospel to all in the way of invitation, in order to induce them to come to Christ, address believers on the necessity of continuing to come to him through life. They show the importance of such admonitions to Christians, by mixing promises and threatenings here, as well as in their addresses to the world. Rom. xi. 19—21. 2 Tim. ii. 12.



Heb. iii. iv. xii. Their<sup>\*</sup> exhortations and warnings are intended to teach us, that the present and future enjoyment of eternal life is connected with our continuing in the faith, and not with believing for once merely, when we first come to the Saviour.

This connection is not arbitrary, but natural. What is the blessing of salvation but the spiritual health of man? It cannot, then, in the nature of things, exist where sin predominates. What will it signify to me that the saints shall persevere, if I am not persevering? No well-grounded confidence can be maintained by looking back to the past, and drawing encouragement from what we have formerly felt and done, if we are not continuing in the faith of the Gospel, and pressing forward in the Christian course. Past sensations can no otherwise be evidences to us of a change of mind, than as the recollection of them excites the same views and exercises afresh. This is what we are taught in the recorded example of Paul, and in the reasoning employed on the fate of the Israelites in the wilderness. Phil. iii. 8—15. Heb. iii. 6, 14. We see in the Apostle himself the necessity of pressing forward to the prize, and of holding fast the truth; and are the more interested, that, from his own feelings of the importance of the subject, he speaks in a way much fitted to impress. He calls upon all to be like-minded with himself, who, though persuaded that the Lord would preserve him to his heavenly kingdom, “kept under his body,” 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27. and laboured that he might be “approved of by his Master at his coming.” 2 Cor. v. 9, 10.

The Hebrews, accordingly, are reminded of their fathers, who, on the banks of the Red Sea, sang the song of Moses, and confessed their faith in God—who reached the very border of the promised land, and yet fell short of it. They loathed the manna, as we are apt to loathe spiritual blessings. Numb. xi. 6. They were discouraged because of the way, as we are ready to fail when assailed with trials and reproach: They



“despised the pleasant land,” Ps. cvi. 24. as we are prone to disregard the prize of eternal life: They did not believe in the God of Abraham as able to give them Canaan, as we are apt to say, “It is in vain to serve God.” Ps. lxxviii. 41—44. The duties and the conflicts of the Christian course often, alas! become irksome to us; and we seek around for a system more agreeable to flesh and blood, if we do not openly relapse.

By carefully examining the Scriptures I have referred-to, and others of a similar nature, you will perceive that the sins even of believers naturally expose to death. The encouragement held out to them is, not that their present or future transgressions are already pardoned, but that there is a throne of grace erected, and that on the ground of the perpetually efficacious sacrifice and prevalent intercession of Christ, they shall be forgiven, on their going again to his Father in his name. That mercy which we are called to seek, is deliverance from merited death; and our present and future peace before God must be sought by the same means by which we at first found forgiveness and enjoyment.

It is well to remember how we have felt, and acted, and suffered, when walking in the truth. This the Hebrews were exhorted to do when in a state of declension. Heb. x. 31—36. Then the Saviour was found “a refuge from the storm, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land;” then sin was hated and holiness cultivated; and, if God were glorified and his favour possessed, all was happiness. If we have gone aside from him, and have lost our firmness, it becomes us to take the alarm; to go afresh to the Redeemer; and again seek our happiness in fellowship with Heaven.

In reference to what you say of the threatenings of Scripture, I would remark, that there is no contrariety between them and the promises of God; and that the belief of the former must produce salutary fear, as the belief of the latter produces hope. Neither is there any contrariety between the fear I have mentioned and the firmest confidence in the Gospel; but both are op-



posed to confidence in ourselves, and in past attainments, while we are not persevering in the faith. It is by no means incompatible with happiness any more than the principle of self-preservation is incompatible with the enjoyment of natural life. When in travelling we come up to any thing which may endanger life, we instinctively step aside, or take some other means to avoid it. Now, in doing this, we may feel quite calm and happy, though certainly nothing less than the fear of injury, or perhaps even death, is the actuating principle. The fear of the avenger of blood would keep the manslayer from leaving the city of refuge, but would not mar his peace while he remained in it. In like manner, the fear of perishing keeps a Christian from departing from Christ, but does not mar his peace and his joy while he continues in the faith of the Redeemer. What are the threatenings of God but expressions of love, by which we are affectionately warned of the inseparable connection which subsists between sin and misery, and are kindly reminded of the connection which subsists between holiness and happiness? It is not correct, then, but very wrong, to look on the threatenings of Heaven as austere; and on the influence of them as opposed to the effect of the promises and the influence of love. Love is seen even in the threatenings of Scripture, as they do the work of mercy; and in fact imply the opposite promises. If we love fellowship with God, the fear of losing this happiness, arising from his threatenings, will serve to make us cleave to the truth, and to walk more humbly with him. In this case, the very denunciations of God do the work of love; and manifest by their effect that they flow from kindness, and not from vindictive wrath.

When I speak of fear in this way, I am far from denying that there is such a thing in Christians as dread of danger, *merely as danger*. Neither do I deny that this feeling is of any service. There are times when even a Christian may need to be awakened by very painful fear. If he has wandered from God he



needs to be roused to a sense of his danger. If the manslayer, for example, had lost the dread of the avenger of blood, and had, therefore, left the city of refuge, the sight of the avenger would awaken his fear ; and if an attempt was made to lay hold of him, it would rise yet higher. Now, would not this fear lead him to run again to the city of refuge ? In like manner, if we leave the Saviour, fear must be excited to cause us to return to him. And as the manslayer, on getting again into the city of refuge, would again have his terror expelled, and his peace restored, so a Christian, on coming afresh to the Saviour, again finds rest. In this state of imperfection, the Lord does not leave our obedience merely to the generosity and the gratitude of the heart. Excellent as are these principles, and naturally as they flow from the Gospel, even the most eminent of Christians are not always powerfully influenced by them ; and, at best, their influence is not perfect. Till that which is perfect is come, we shall have need of our fears, as well as our hopes being stimulated ; and both are provided for in the plan of redemption through the cross. It is, however, our duty, and will be found a privilege, to aim at that state of mind, in which the more excellent principles of obedience govern the heart and regulate the life.

I beg your attention to one point connected with this subject, which is of the first moment. Perseverance can never mean simply an arbitrary connection between two distant, or distinct, things. The very term signifies continuance in a particular course. The way which leads from any place to the capital of a kingdom, will conduct the traveller to it, provided he persevere in his journey,—but not otherwise. It is not enough that he enter on the road, and for a little walk in it ; he must continue in it, otherwise he can never reach the place of his destination. In like manner, Christian perseverance does not mark an arbitrary connection between faith on our first coming to Christ, and the prize of eternal life in heaven ; it connects these two by means



of the whole intermediate course. The Scriptures say, "The righteous shall hold on his way," Job xvii. 9. not that he shall get safe to his journey's end, let him wander which way he pleases. False notions on this subject join together a beginning and an end, and leave the intervening space to be filled up as the sinful heart may incline. Perseverance is thus considered as a mere continuance in safety. How opposite is this to the truth ! The very *word*, as I have said, is expressive of continued progress, with a view to a particular end. What is it, then, to persevere, but to continue to walk in the same course on which we have entered ? And if so, no person can take comfort from the doctrine, properly understood, who is not himself at the time persevering in faith and obedience. In this way only can we enjoy the blessing of salvation.

On this principle go all the instructions of the apostles. When men made a scriptural profession of the faith, and when, as far as man could judge, their spirit and deportment corresponded, they were received into the first churches as acknowledged Christians, and as such were addressed in the apostolic epistles. They were there taught, that real Christians should be preserved, to eternal life ; but never did the writers connect with this doctrine a supposition, that they could not be mistaken in the favourable opinion they had once formed of particular characters. The more that they grew in knowledge and in the fruits of obedience, the more did the apostles rejoice,—and the greater was their confidence in them. But the servants of Christ had often many fears, because ~~they~~ they were aware of the many temptations to which the disciples were exposed ; and because they saw numbers who once appeared to walk in the truth, turn aside into sin. In some such cases, they for a time "stood in doubt," and feared "that they had laboured in vain," Gal. iv. 11, 20 ; and when characters of this kind were not reclaimed, they disowned them. 1 Tim. i. 20. In other cases, the character was at once proved to be bad, and then instant expulsion took place



1 Cor. v. 13. In all instances of apostacy, they said —“ they went out from us, because they were not of us,” 1 John ii. 19. These declensions did not prove that Christians had fallen away, but that they who had thus gone back had never been genuine disciples. Still the apostles addressed men as they appeared to be at the time; never ceasing, however, to warn them of the necessity of continuing in the faith. They taught them that it was no strange thing if some drew back; yet they expressed their full confidence respecting the final salvation of such as manifested their faith by standing fast in the truth. They did so on the ground of the promise, that the true flock of Christ shall never perish. Faith in this promise was perfectly consistent with fear as to individuals; just as faith in the absolute promise that Israel as a nation should inherit Canaan would not be overturned by the fall of multitudes in the wilderness. The persuasion that true Christians shall be preserved, is quite different from a persuasion that all who profess to be such shall finally be saved. Hence the care that was taken to guard against declension.

When Paul warns even such as he most affectionately esteemed for the truth's sake, it cannot have been from any particular jealousy of them, but from jealousy of human nature. He has by his solemn admonitions, even to characters of the highest eminence, taught us, in the most impressive manner, that the means and the end ought never to be separated. He had full confidence in Timothy; yet how solemnly does he warn him of the danger of departing from God, and of the necessity of continuing in the faith, the love, and the obedience of the truth. 1 Tim. iv. 16, and vi. 11—14, 20, 21. 2 Tim. ii. 22, and iv. 1, 2. In his doctrine we clearly see, that while our title to eternal life is independent of deeds of law, the actual enjoyment of the blessing is necessarily connected with obedience; for what is holiness but likeness to the law of Heaven? and what is eternal life but happiness springing from conformity to the char-



acter and will of God, as displayed in that Gospel which hath "magnified his law, and made it honourable?"

I have thus, my dear friend, given you my views of the subjects you mentioned. If these hints shall be of any use in furthering your edification, it will be gratifying to me, and will cause thanksgiving to God.

I am, &c.

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## LETTER X.

### ON THE DEATH OF A RELATIVE.

The character of Christ, the great spring of consolation—The import of his address to John in the Isle of Patmos—The power of the Gospel in affliction and death—The death of friends ought to be improved—The contemplation of heaven, a means of support—Dark providences will yet be explained—Some causes of this darkness—The nature of Christian patience—This exemplified by Christ—The importance of confidence in God—The blessedness of departed saints, a source of comfort—The duty of cherishing faith, holy joy, and Christian hope—Conclusion.

#### MY DEAR FRIEND,

I CANNOT but again express my sympathy with you under your recent bereavement, and shall now, as formerly, direct your attention to the character of our Lord as the best spring of consolation under the losses and the afflictions of life. It is our unspeakable comfort that the Saviour has risen from the dead, and has thus been manifested as "the first born among many brethren," Rom. viii. 29. In the redeemed family he is called "the first born," as a title of dignity and authority, because of the privileges which, in ancient times, and by divine direction, were the birthright of the elder brother. In this endearing relation does he stand to us amidst all our infirmities and trials. He is "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." He has a tender and an affectionate feeling, as our brother, for all our wants and infirmities, and is ready to relieve and assist us. He is,



in particular, "the first born from the dead," Col. i. 18. and in this character he bears a relation to his people even when in the grave; and is engaged to watch over their dust, and to "raise them at the last day." Yes; death is far from dissolving the relation between him and his brethren;—their very dust is dear to him. His resurrection is at once the pledge and the pattern of that of his redeemed. In his exalted state he has "the keys of hell," that is, of the unseen state of departed spirits,—and "the keys also of death," that is, of the grave.

The Redeemer, then, is Ruler in the other world as well as in this. It was by exhibiting himself in this light to John in the Isle of Patmos, that he sought to comfort him when overwhelmed with terror at his august appearance. He appeared to the beloved disciple in a dress like to that of the Jewish high-priest, and in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, to intimate that he officiated as a priest in the temple of God. Rev. i. 12—18. He appeared, at the same time, in such glory, as clearly exhibited his infinite dignity and grandeur as Emmanuel, the excellencies of his mediatorial character, and his inconceivable elevation as Lord of the church, and of all worlds. In a word, he appeared in the body of his glory, as he now sits "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This was too much for John, in his present state of frailty, to bear. Though "he was the beloved disciple" who had often leaned on his breast at table, he was overwhelmed with fear, and fell at his feet as dead. This fear arose partly from a sense of guilt, and partly from human weakness. He was not altogether ignorant of the personage whom he saw; for we find from what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration, that the appearance of our Lord's body was changed without preventing his disciples from recognising him, and of this display of the glory of the Redeemer John had been a witness. In his present state of astonishment, he could not, however, think with composure on what he beheld. To settle all doubts, and



to satisfy him that this was a real appearance of his Lord, and an appearance not in anger, but in love, the Saviour kindly laid his right hand upon him, and affectionately said, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

The various emotions of the Apostle's heart were thus tenderly met, and his fears graciously dispelled. Did a consciousness of guilt appal him, and invest death with terrors, he was thus directed to that one perfect atonement which the Saviour has made for sin—to the dignity of his person as the everlasting God in our nature, as the great cause of the infinite value of his death—to his love, as manifested in suffering and dying for sinners—to his victory over death, in his resurrection, as the great proof of the divine acceptance of his sacrifice—to the abolition of the power of death—to the incorruption which was brought to light by his triumph over the grave—to his eternal life in the heavenly temple—to his glorious government as Lord of all worlds—and to his priestly grandeur in the sanctuary. By all this does the Saviour calm the trembling conscience, dissipate the dread of death, and enlighten the gloom of the grave. These views, indeed, had long supported the mind of the apostle; but at present the unexpected and glorious vision of his Lord had quite overwhelmed him, so that he required them to be again distinctly set before him.

Did John recoil at the thought of entering the world of spirits, and appearing in a new and untried state? Jesus exhibits himself as the forerunner of his people, who has gone to heaven as "the first fruits of them that slept," and "to prepare a place" for his redeemed. 1 Cor. xv. 20. John xiv. 2. Heb. vi. 20. He declares that he has the government of both worlds, so that, in passing from this to the other, we are not leaving his dominions. He is there as well as here, and is ready to receive and welcome us on our arrival. Nor is this



all ; he will also be with us in the waters of death, to guide, comfort, and support us. . Thus are the clouds dispelled which overspread the invisible world. The way into the holiest is laid open by our great high-priest who hath entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us," Heb. ix. 24.

Was John unable, without supernatural aid, to look upon the glory of his Master ? Surely when strengthened, as he now was, to behold that which "flesh and blood, as at present constituted, cannot inherit," he must have been elevated beyond conception. He contemplated in the Saviour what he should behold when "absent from the body," and "present with the Lord," 2 Cor. v. 6—8 ; and what he himself should be, when death shall have been swallowed up in victory. He who now stood before him had the supreme dominion in all worlds, and so could open the gates of paradise to the souls of his sheep, after guiding and supporting them with his rod and staff in the dark vale of the king of terrors ; and should at last open their graves, and call them in the embodied state to the heavenly glory.

We are thus directed by the Saviour to his God and Father, as our God and Father ; and to his home, as our home. Though we are at a distance from our Father's house, we are not the less the children of his family. We are, indeed in a foreign land ; yet, as the veil of the sanctuary is now removed, we by faith see its glory and listen to its songs. The mercy-seat is no longer concealed, and the ministrations of the great high-priest are disclosed to our view. Heb. ix. and xi. 22. This is admirably calculated to attract our hearts ; and when contemplated as exhibited in the revelation of peace, must excite us to unite in the hallowed services of the sacred temple. Well may our spirits be elevated on the death of our brethren in Christ, when, as they are removed from us, we by faith see them joining this glorious assembly. Sweet, in such circumstances, are the words of our Lord and his apostles, entreating us not to let our "hearts be troubled," and



"not to sorrow as those who have no hope," but are left to the darkness that naturally covers the grave, and overwhelms the heart with its gloom. John xiv. 1, 27. 1 Thess. iv. 13—18. Delightful is the encouraging call to indulge the hope of meeting our departed Christian friends in the world of light and of love, because, "as Jesus died and rose again, so all who sleep in him will God bring with him." Such discoveries are well calculated to sooth the mind in the hour of affliction.

The address of the Saviour to John is fraught with consolation to *us*, and may well fill us with peace and with joy in the nearest prospect of dissolution. Yes; when death prevails over nature, and all power of speech fails, even then the eyes often speak the gratitude and the gladness of the heart, arising from a view of the glory of the finished work of Christ, and of the divine delight in it, as expressed in his resurrection and his heavenly elevation.—Enlightened and impressive views of these blessed objects tranquillize the heart of the Christian, and fill it with joy. Here, then, is that which, when distinctly seen, can sustain the mind under all its weaknesses, and support it under the heaviest pressure. \*Certain afflictions may, indeed, so affect the spirit, as for a time to deprive it of the consolation of the truth, just as the mind of John was unhinged by the vision; but let the cause of this be removed, and the truth clearly unfolded, and its influence will be felt.

Such manifestations of the power of the Gospel are confirming and animating. They are so many lights, illuminating even the darkest of the gloomy paths which occur in our progress to the heavenly glory. Natural feelings are not forbidden; but let them not keep you from looking to him, who, though "the first and the last, and the living one," is full of the tenderest sympathy and compassion. Mysterious, indeed, are many of the dispensations of Heaven; but in the midst of the most intricate and complex movements of providence, look to him who "has the government upon his shoulder," Isaiah ix. 6; is guiding every event in infinite



wisdom, and is making all his visitations "work together for good." Think of the "rainbow that is around the throne," and reflect on this token of the perpetuity of "the covenant of peace." Rev. iv. 3. Gen. ix. 16. Isaiah liv. 9, 10. He who hath ratified this covenant lives to accomplish its many and precious promises. He can and will give you strength equal to your day, and preserve you to his heavenly kingdom,—where your every tear shall be wiped away, and death at last be swallowed up in victory.

Seek, then, that friends may not sicken and die in vain. Let every pleasing recollection, every sentiment of esteem, and every feeling of affection, which you fondly and warmly cherish, and every hope and holy anticipation in which you indulge, unite in leading you to him whose grace made them what they were, that you may resemble their excellence, and participate in their joys. In all your mournful yet pleasing musings on their character, seek, that, while you the more feel your loss, as you recount their many valuable qualities, you may find in the work and excellencies of the Redeemer all that can satisfy and purify the soul. In the enjoyment of fellowship with Heaven, the sudden cry, that the Saviour cometh, will delight you as the blissful salutation of mercy, calling you to the banquet of heavenly and everlasting love.

In your present trial, seek to abound in the precious fruits of patience and devotion. Dwell on the words of eternal life, as the source of that ineffable consolation which raises the mind above the infirmities of the body, and yields unutterable bliss in the prospect of beholding the glory of the Lord, and participating in his hallowed joys. He can impart such views of the heavenly state, as the seat of all that is glorious and blissful, because the abode of the God and Father of the redeemed family, and of him who loved us and gave himself for us, as shall disarm death of its terrors, and change it into an object of desire. Let the Gospel of Christ "dwell richly" in your mind, and you will be freed



from all painful anxiety about the result of your trials, by the confidence which it will inspire towards him who in wisdom and love is guiding every event. Let nothing keep you from that blessed word which cherishes peaceful resignation, and can subdue all that would disturb the repose of the heart, or unduly agitate the soul with sorrow. There is a placid serenity, and an unreining, yea, even a cheerful submission, attainable through lively and steady faith in the cross, and in fellowship with him who there suffered and died. By these is the Gospel adorned, and our heavenly Father glorified, while the heart is completely satisfied.

Forget not that the cup given you is filled and mingled by the hand of your Father. However bitter it may be, it is full of blessing, "for not a drop of the curse is there." Rom. viii. 28, 35—39. 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. He who covereth his throne with darkness, and whose ways are to us often inscrutable, is he who hath tenderly and affectionately said, "No, I will not leave thee; no, no, I will not forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5. No fewer than five negatives are here employed to shut out fear and distrust, and to assure us of the presence and the care of our Father. You may, then, on the ground of these reiterated assurances, commit your life to him with the firmest confidence; happy in the thought, that in the world of light all will be made plain. Then you will, from the heart, bless him for all his goodness; and for this, as especially manifested in your heaviest afflictions. Let this consideration hush to silence all the agitations of your heart.

Cherish, with these views, that submissive and patient spirit which flows from confidence and affection; and which is altogether different from the constrained submission of necessity, accompanied, as it often is, with the sullenness of obstinacy. Christian resignation is not extorted. It is the cordial acquiescence of an enlightened and affectionate child, who loves and confides in his Father, even when he thwarts the fondest wishes of his heart. It is the same with that holy disposition



and cheerful resignation, displayed by the Redeemer, when he bowed to the will of Heaven, and drank of his bitter cup, with a full submission to him who had mingled its whole afflictive ingredients. His heart, though bleeding with tortures the most agonizing, and overwhelmed with anguish inconceivable, ever felt a perfect and cheerful acquiescence in the will of God. Luke xxii. 42.

Pause for a moment, and think, how great must have been the warmth of the love of Christ, when he assumed our nature—bore our sorrows—and for us, under agonies unutterable, yielded up his life. Here we see at once the foundation of our hope, and the high and holy pattern we are called to imitate. Never cease to dwell upon this, for even in the midst of heaven, where we shall see him in his glory, we must look back to Calvary that we may behold, in their brightest lustre, the wonders of his character. Yes: It is in “the hour and power of darkness,” when he was encompassed with grief, and overwhelmed with restless agitation of heart, that the true glories of the Saviour appear. Then in a special manner, did he endure the curse that we might “inherit a blessing.” Here you will learn how it is that we are destined to be made meet for the inheritance of his kingdom; and how it is that the Lord manifests his love to his children. The first-born of the family went from the cross to the crown; and as he humbled himself to become in all things like to us here, so it is his will that we should in all things be made like to him hereafter.—Well can he enter into all your feelings in the day of your distress. Think of this, and turn to that temple where he now reigns and officiates as our Priest; where, from the tenderest love, he still watches over his people,—and from whence he continues to display to them the greatest of blessings in the richest profusion.

You may, in the midst of all the darkness of the heaviest affliction, look to him “as your light and your salvation,” Psalm xxvii. 1. and so shall all gloom be



dispelled, and a pleasing and glorious brightness be shed upon your path. This will teach you what the bliss of the Christian is, when he waits upon God, and views him with unpresumptuous confidence as his Friend, his Father, and his all-sufficient portion, amidst the devastations of the most bereaving trials. Soothing, indeed, will you find it, to rest on the promises of the covenant of peace,—to wait with calm serenity for “the crown of life,” and to repose your heart on him “who is able to keep all committed to him against that day,” 2 Tim. i. 12. Though at present his ways are obscure, remember that he has said, “What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter,” John xiii. 7. Blessed are they who are freed from that excessive sorrow which unnerves and weakens the mind, and delivered also from that insensibility which fosters presumption and carnality of heart. From both the Saviour can deliver us. He can and will give you, in answer to fervent and importunate prayer, his Holy Spirit,—through whom the mind is enabled to exercise that patience, which is equally removed from the evil of despising the chastening of the Lord, on the one hand, and of fainting under his rod, on the other.

Though bereaved of those who were in the height of their influence and usefulness, and ready to wonder at the mysterious ways of Providence, and to question their wisdom and their goodness, be not discouraged. Remember that much of the darkness of Providence arises from our incapacity to form an extensive judgment. We see but a very small part of the divine operations; and judge rashly of the whole, by the portion which comes under our view. Much of this obscurity arises from the powerful excitement of our passions, which darkens our mind by the character of our desires and our aversions; and so unfits us for calm and deliberate reflection.\* Not a little of it arises from the seeming contrariety of Providence to our interests, and to the promises of Heaven. Such views of our lot must unfit us for forming an impartial judgment. It is for



us, then, under a deep sense of our weakness and unworthiness, to wait upon God, and to leave it to him to act as his wisdom and his love shall direct.

Reflect on the blessedness of the departed in the heavenly temple. When in this world, they were happy in the enjoyment of the divine favour. In circumstances of the deepest affliction, they found joy in the Gospel; and in the prospect of death, they had the sure and certain hope of being immediately with their Lord, and of a blessed resurrection at his second coming. These blessings and exalted hopes animated their hearts with sacred and sanctifying delight. On this I need say no more; for at the death-bed of her who is gone, you witnessed, in circumstances the most interesting, what in vain I should attempt to describe. But, happy as she and others of your departed friends were on earth, unspeakably greater is their happiness in heaven. Now they are perfectly freed from all sin, care, and temptation: sorrow and sighing have for ever fled away: they are satisfied in beholding and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer, and in contemplating the glory of their God. Let us not grieve immoderately, since they are blessed beyond measure in that happy state of ineffable and durable joy; of constant and animated devotion; and of increasing progression, in all that is great, and in all that is good.

Permit me to recommend to you the exercise of constant and strong faith in God. Leave futurity to him: to us it is wisely veiled. Our ignorance, however, respects the allotments of time more than the interests of eternity. We know that "the end is everlasting life," though we know not the length nor the nature of the way: we know not the time or the manner of our death; but we know that he who passed this Jordan, when the waters overflowed and the storm raged, will be with us in the river—will divide the waters, and guide us along a smooth, a dry, and a safe path. We cannot tell what it is to die; but we know that one will be with us who



has himself died, and that death will usher us in to the house of our Father. Remember that this world is a state of pilgrimage. All that is granted here we should consider as but accommodations on our way home; and of all the troubles with which we meet we may say, these are but the inconveniences of a journey in a land of strangers. When we view our troubles as only the inconveniences incident to a state of pilgrimage, we are comforted and sustained by the thought that all of them will soon be over, and by the recollection that, in the mean time, they are hastening our progress homeward.

Cherish the spirit of that humble and holy joy in God, and in divine things, which strengthens the heart and recommends the Gospel. Let the words of your God be the theme of your songs as your pilgrimage advances. This "joy of the Lord" will renew your strength for the journey, and your path will become "like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day," Prov. iv. 18. Set your heart on the treasures of bliss and of glory which are with the Saviour. You must have felt that the removal of a friend to a distance is followed by a feeling of loneliness: Much more will the death of a friend or beloved relative. You now feel that the world is not what it was. In such circumstances the mind follows the departed with the deepest interest: Heaven, so to speak, becomes more attractive, and the world has not its wonted charms. The very dust of the dead is dear to us, and we go "to the grave to weep there." At the grave of a Christian, however, sorrow is mingled with hope; for while we weep, we hear, with holy and animated pleasure, the voice which says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," Rev. xiv. 13. It is our consolation that, while we think of the death of the Redeemer, we cannot go to *his* grave to weep: He hath left it, and hath gone to glory in a spiritual body. In regard to *him*, our hearts are not divided between what is in the tomb and what is in heaven. He hath risen



a triumphant conqueror, and is now on high in the embodied state. Shall we not follow him, then, in our thoughts, affections, and desires? Col. iii. 1, 2.

"Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry," Heb. x. 37. Let us, then, stir up all our courage and all our energies; for, after a night of darkness and of weariness, "the morning is spread upon the mountains"—"the day is at hand:"—"Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed," Rom. xiii. 11. Has the storm been heavy and tedious? be not on this account discouraged, for the land is in sight, and a few struggles more will conduct you to a safe harbour. Lift up, then, the hands which hang down; in faith and patience fight the good fight; and, with the steadiest eye on your leader, run the race which is set before you. If your path is rugged, and your heart ready to fail you, as you follow those who have gone before you, and recall to memory the scenes of other days, and the images of friends and relatives gone to return no more; let this excite you to cling with deeper interest to that Gospel which assures you that "the Captain of Salvation" will be with you to the end, and that you shall see those who have departed where the Saviour himself is. There he will be your and their chief joy, "and exceeding great reward." In this pensive but yet pleasing retrospect, and in this blissful anticipation of being ever with the Lord, and with the endeared objects of your natural and Christian affection, let all your sorrows be lost; and be animated to proceed, with growing zeal and activity, in the honourable and the heavenly race of faith.

I am, &c.



## LETTER XI.

## ON THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTION.

Afflictions the common lot of mankind—Ought to be improved—  
 Designed to sanctify the soul—The means of preventing sin—  
 Serve to try\* the character—Strengthen religious principle—  
 Fit for extensive usefulness—Are blessed for the purpose of  
 awakening to a sense of sin and of misery—Lead to acknowledge  
 the hand of God—Make us sensible of our proper place—Lead  
 to the Scriptures and the Throne of Grace—Teach the uncer-  
 tainty of earthly things—The happiness of confidence in God  
 when under them—Christians need to have fear as well as love  
 kept alive—The danger of despising the rod, and of fainting un-  
 der it—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I FEEL for you under your trials ; and, with a view to your comfort, I mean in this letter to suggest to you some reflections on the benefits that may be derived from affliction. In this world we are ever exposed to tribulation, and yet\* it often comes upon us unexpectedly. We speak indeed of the instability of all earthly things, but are not sufficiently aware of our constant jeopardy. We indulge the flatteries of hope in regard to ourselves, even when we witness the sudden and the heavy calamities of others. Much discipline in the school of affliction is necessary to cure us of this propensity to dream of security in the face of so many proofs of the uncertainty of every thing below. Often have the brightest prospects been unexpectedly darkened, and hopes apparently the most warranted have been sadly disappointed. This has been done to shake our confidence in the present scene, and to prepare the mind for the will of God. Trials, the bare idea of which is sufficient to make us shrink, may yet be found necessary to the healing of our souls.

When visited with affliction, we ought fervently to seek that it may be blessed to us. He who chastens us



does it in love : he has graciously invited us to call upon him in the day of trouble ; and has promised to hear our prayers, and to grant us what his wisdom and his goodness shall dictate. Ps. l. 15. Deeply we ought to feel the hand of our God,—with profound humility we ought to bear it,—and with meek resignation we ought to bow to his will. Instead of sinking into despondency because our earthly lot is distressing, it becomes us to bless the Lord that he will not leave us to ourselves, nor suffer us to make present enjoyments our rest ; but, by withering our earthly joys, he points us to a better happiness. If our path is dark, let this cheer us—there is a bright morning on its way : if change after change come in sad succession, the covenant of peace is an everlasting covenant, and of its blessings nothing can bereave us.

The great design of affliction is to sanctify us. God chastens us “ that we may be made partakers of his holiness : ” he effects this by correcting us for our transgressions. In this way he restrains our impetuous passions, purges away our pollutions, and embitters to us the ways of sin. He wounds that he may heal : “ he prunes the branches of the true vine, that they may become more fruitful.” John xv. 2. When his people “ break his laws, and keep not his commandments, he visits their iniquities with the rod, and their sins with chastisement.” Ps. lxxxix. 30—32. When we are running from the fountain of living waters, and seeking cistern after cistern, he in mercy destroys these, one after another, to cure us of our folly. When any earthly object steals our heart from himself, he breaks our idol before us, and makes its vanity manifest. We then feel that this is indeed “ a dry and a thirsty land ; ” a land of death and of darkness. But he who caused the wreck of our earthly joys, did it that he might lead us to take our stand on the sure foundation of his word : he who broke our cisterns and withered our gourds, designed thus to lead us to fountains of living water, and to the refreshing shade of the paradise of God. Not



that he stands in need of our services, but because that without him we must be miserable. His love to us, and his desire that we may be happy, will not allow him to suffer us to be deceived and destroyed. He cannot think of leaving us to make the world our portion : but, even at the expense of the most painful afflictions, will call us from that which is not, to substantial and permanent blessedness. Often do we seek rest in that which cannot yield it—often do we leave the only refuge from the storm, and betake ourselves to the sands ; and so may expect to be visited with tempests and inundations. We need checks and disappointments to our pursuits and our hopes, that we may learn by experience that we have no true happiness but in God—no home but heaven. Even in these storms his love is made manifest. A voice is heard saying, “ It is I, be not afraid.” Thus the heart is at once humbled and tranquillized. Sharp afflictions refine the soul. Should our inordinate desires be gratified, our earthly hopes and imaginations fed, and our sinister ends secured, we should die of this indulgence. But he who loves us will not suffer this. He frames his dispensations according to our real wants, and not according to our foolish wishes. Were his love cold, or were it but foolish fondness, he would act otherwise ; but in that case we should be ruined.

Afflictions are designed to prevent, as well as to recover from sin. Should we in the day of trouble be unable to discover any particular transgression in which we have indulged, we ought not to question the goodness of God ; for he sees the future in the present. We may not have formed and worshipped any particular idol, but he saw that we were about to do it—he saw a train of circumstances commencing, which owing to our habits, tempers, and dispositions, would be a snare to us ; and he determined to prevent the evil. Prevention surely is better than cure ; and merciful indeed must it be to render the pursuit of sin bitter and difficult. Hezekiah was suffered to fall into pride ; ut



Paul was prevented from doing so by "a thorn in the flesh." 2 Kings xx. 12—19. 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26, 31. 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. Which of these two cases, then, is the most desirable, and which of them affords the highest demonstration of love? The second, surely. If we are about to go astray, is it not well that God "hedges up our way with thorns," and "builds a wall," that he may make our wanderings from him perplexing, embarrassing and painful? Hosea ii. 6, 7. In his providence he removes us from this or the other situation, where we might have been corrupted: he breaks ensnaring friendships—keeps from forming improper connections—removes or embitters worldly comforts; and sends disappointments and trials, to keep us humble, holy, and watchful. He withdraws us from our purpose, because it would destroy us. Job xxxiii. 17. In reviewing the course of a gracious providence, we may see many salutary instances of this nature; and the retrospect ought to excite a spirit of confidence and of gratitude towards him, who preserves us from what would at once have dishonoured his name and deeply injured ourselves.

Afflictions are designed to be trials likewise: they are so with a special view to the discovery of our disorders, in order to their cure; and the exercise of our holy principles, in order to their growth. Tribulation often calls forth the latent corruptions of the heart: the mind feels the workings of impatience; the heart frets, murmurs, and repines, against the painful providence of Heaven; earthly attachments are found to be strong, and the spirit of rebellion seems to gain vigour. We startle, as if our trials had caused those evils; whereas they have only brought to light what had always been within, but in a state of concealment. Our faith and confidence are thus brought to the test, and we find, to our shame, how apt we are to distrust the God of our mercies. We are led, like Ezekiel, from one evil to another; and hear the voice which said to him, "Son



of man, I will show thee yet more and greater abominations than these."

Afflictions serve to discover our natural wretchedness and our utter helplessness. In the time of overwhelming distress and deep agitation, we often feel unable even to address the Hearer of prayer, and are ready to write bitter things against ourselves, and to look on this as a token of the heavy displeasure of Heaven. The design of our heavenly Father, however, is to convince us of our ignorance, depravity, and weakness—to make us feel our utter wretchedness in ourselves, and our entire dependence on him. We need to be cured of self-confidence, to have our idols broken before us, and to be led to implicit reliance on God. There are times in which we feel so happy in the enjoyment of fellowship with him, that we think the loss of any earthly comfort would be borne with comparative ease. But when the delight of our eyes is removed, we feel that our life was much bound up in the creature, and are surprised at the discontent of our hearts. We pray that the Lord would humble and sanctify us; and he answers us, not merely by the soft and gradual influence of his truth, but by employing afflictions to illustrate it to us, and to impress it on our minds. We are thus made to feel more of the evils of our spirit, and the more to prize the remedy. We may have wondered at the conduct of others when in certain circumstances; but when beset with the same temptations ourselves, we may have acted a much worse part. This, though it ought not to lessen our impressions of the evil of sin, ought to teach us candour and humility.

Thus is the Lord "proving us" for our good. Deut. viii. 2, 16. If, indeed, we sink into despair; if we continue to pore upon the evils which affliction has discovered, without going at once to the physician; if we struggle against them in our own strength; or if we begin to make our sense of vileness, and our supposed humility, a sort of foundation for hope and confidence—



of course we have not profited by the discovery, but have become worse than before. But if the discovery of our evils has deepened our sense of the depravity of our nature ; if it has endeared to us the rich and the free pardoning mercy of God ; if it has led us afresh to the blood of the cross for the remission of our sins ; if it has endeared to us the character of Jesus, as a Saviour from sin ; and if it has led us to him for a complete cure—then has it been truly salutary. Being thus made sensible of our many wants, and led to see the entire suitableness of the Gospel to our condition in all its extent, we learn to live more simply by the faith of Christ ; and to cherish an humble and devotional spirit, in the exercise of every Christian principle, and the practice of every Christian duty. We are taught by this means to unite confidence in our leader with the utmost vigilance against temptation and snares, and with unremitting activity in the service of him who loved us and gave himself for us.

But afflictions do not only discover our evils : they try our religious principles, and so make them manifest. They serve to show the reality and the measure of our piety. When Abraham was called to offer up his son, his faith in God, and his sacred regard to his will, were made manifest. But the design was not simply to make them manifest, but exercise them ; and so to increase their vigour, and add to his joy. In the day of prosperity, there is not the same scope for the manifestation of those principles which constitute the soul of genuine religion as there is in the day of adversity. In the season of trial our earthly props are shaken, or removed ; and it is seen how far we have learned to seek our all in God, and our God in all.

I am led to remark, in connection with this, that afflictions enlarge our views, increase our desire of spiritual things, and capacitate us for more ample measures of divine grace, and degrees of sacred joy. Paul was called to uncommon trials ; but he had corresponding support and consolation. 2 Cor. i. 5. Strong as was



his faith, and ardent as was his piety, they admitted of farther degrees ; and the increase of the hallowed principles of genuine religion was far more than an equivalent for all the extremities he endured. This is one great thing taught us in his beautiful description of the benefit of affliction, in Rom. v. 3, 4, 5.

In relation to this, I would remind you that when afflictions thus strengthen piety, and are connected with more than proportionate joy, they fit for kinds and degrees of usefulness for which we could not otherwise be qualified. This consideration animated Paul under all his distresses. It was his joy that he was afflicted, not merely for his own sake, but that he might be taught by experience how “to comfort others with the same comfort with which he had been comforted of God.” 2 Cor. i. 4—7. The consolation he received was endeared to him, by the thought that the benefit of it might be reflected on others. But, besides the particular case of comfort in trouble, there is a general principle here stated ; namely, that afflictions are not always directly intended for the correction of evil, or for the prevention of it ; but are meant to qualify for more extensive and varied usefulness, whether in comforting those that are cast down, or in otherwise profiting our brethren. We, of course, ought to be concerned, not only that ourselves, but that others also, may be blessed by our trials. Throughout the Scriptures this generous spirit is inculcated and cherished. The troubles of Joseph prepared him to be the saviour of Egypt, and of his father’s family. The solitude and circumstances of Moses, when secluded at Mount Horeb, fitted him to be the leader of Israel. The trials of David, after he was anointed, prepared him for the government of the kingdom of God. But, above all, did not the humiliation of the Saviour himself qualify him in certain respects for his glory ? Heb. ii. 17, 18.

One way in which the afflictions of Christians are of general utility, is the display which they afford of the power of divine grace, and the happy influence of the



Gospel in sustaining and animating the mind under the heaviest trials. That this manifestation may be made of the nature and tendency of genuine religion, the Lord calls his people to manifold trials; and deeply ought we to feel our responsibility in the hour of tribulation. On us observation is fixed, and the Gospel is judged of by our deportment. Facts impress more than mere statements. We profess to have special resources under the afflictions of life. We declare also, that it is at once our duty and our privilege to bow with cheerfulness to the will of God. We have, then, a post of honour to maintain, and it becomes us to prove, that, though sorrowful, we are always rejoicing. The spirit and the behaviour of heavily afflicted Christians have awakened attention to the truth; have reclaimed the irreligious; have strengthened the weak, and encouraged the timid. Is not, then, an afflictive event to be prized as a means of usefulness, by the illustration it may afford of the nature and the blessedness of genuine piety, and the consequent recommendation of the Gospel to the attention of others? But as time is connected with eternity, the afflictions of this state are also designed to fit us for the world of light and of blessedness, and for high degrees of glory and happiness there. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

Such are some of the views in which affliction is represented in Scripture. Keeping them in eye, suffer me to suggest to you a few general observations connected with the subject. The trials of time are often blessed, for the purpose of awakening us to a sense of sin and of wretchedness. The evils of the heart and of the life, the temptations incident to particular circumstances, and the many dangers which attend this state of vanity, are all made to rise before the mind, and deeply to impress it. Thus were the brethren of Joseph profited by the embarrassing circumstances in which they were placed in Egypt. Gen. xlii. 21. In the same way was Manasseh humbled, and brought to repentance. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13. Instead of seeking to evade



the charges of conscience, we then admit them to be just. We murmur not at the stroke of Heaven, but confess that we are punished less than our iniquities deserve. The mind is opened to perceive, and the heart to embrace, that resting place, and that full provision, which the Gospel hath provided. It is truly a blessing to have the spell broken, and the enchantment dissolved, which have so long enslaved us,—and so blinded us, that the real state of things has been hid. When the soul is led to the Saviour, is made to wait upon him, and to cast itself upon his mercy ; however painful the means, the end compensates for all. When the heart is made to cling to the cross of the Redeemer, and to build its whole hope upon his finished work, there is much cause for thankfulness to God, who, rather than suffer us to sleep in sin and in false security, awakened us by trouble, and gave us rest in himself,—rest which abides in the midst of trials the most acute and the most protracted, and which shall issue in life everlasting.

The way in which affliction operates upon the mind of a sinner when first led to the truth, is, in many respects, similar to that in which it sanctifies the soul of a Christian. In neither case can the evils of life, of themselves, change the heart ; but in both, the mind is led to that which, when believed, works effectually in renovating the whole man. Permit me, then, to call your attention to some of the ways in which affliction becomes profitable.

Trials are of use in leading us to consider and to acknowledge the hand of our God. Job, in the day of his affliction, rose above second causes ; and said that he who had taken away, was he who had given ; and blessed his name. Job i. 21, 22. The recollection of the hand of God made the Psalmist keep silent, and bowed his mind to the will of Heaven. Ps. xxxix. 9. David, when reproached by Shimei, looked up to him who had permitted him to do so ; and this calmed his heart, and cherished a spirit of forgiveness. 2 Samuel xvi. 11, 12. Nothing happens to us by chance ; we



are not left fatherless ; for the providence of God is concerned in our trials. We are apt, in our journey, to stop at second causes, whether the occurrences of the way are what we call prosperous or adverse. It is humbling that we so often walk on without meeting God, and that the very instruments which he employs come between us and himself. This must be highly dishonourable to him ; and must deprive us of the benefit of affliction, while it converts prosperity into the means of cherishing the most unhallowed principles. Against this we ought vigilantly to guard, under the firm conviction that his glory and our happiness are inseparably connected. If he remove from us our earthly comforts, it is that we may see their nature, and be led to aspire after that which is certain—that “ better part which shall never be taken from us.” Sweet is the privilege of being able to look to God as a Father, and to every event as coming from him who loved us and gave himself for us.

The afflictions of life have profited us when they have made us sensible of our proper place before God ; when they have enlarged our views of his holy character and his righteous law, and have led us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand. It is essential to our real happiness to be in our proper station, and to take pleasure in being so. Whatever tends to humble us, and to prove us, tends to do us good in our latter end. When reduced to situations in which human aid is felt to be powerless, and so obliged to cast ourselves on God, we feel our weakness and dependence. Under the loss of our earthly comforts, we feel our littleness, and that we are not worthy of the least of his mercies ; and we bow to his will, in the confidence that, in his own way, and at the proper time, he will lift us up. We are taught to think more soberly, and to bless the Lord that we are not wholly consumed : We acknowledge the righteousness of God, and become more watchful against sin and the many temptations incident to this state of vanity.



The troubles of this state are blessed as means of leading us to the word of God. They throw much light on Scripture ; while it at the same time throws much light on them. In the hour of trial it is found to be a guide, a preservative from sin, and the source of great consolation. The promises of God are found to be truly precious ; and he himself is proved to be an all-sufficient portion in the absence of all earthly good. The Scriptures appear in a new light, and we search them with a new spirit. Psalm cxix. 18, 49, 50, 52, 54, 97, 108. Our experience of their complete adaptation to the state and the wants of the soul, increases our knowledge of their worth and their import. In circumstances the most trying to nature, the heart is delighted with the bright light thrown on the character and the ways of God ; and is made to rejoice in the glory, and to feel the power of his truth. The soul is particularly occupied with the work and administration of the Saviour ; and is gratified in surveying a plan of redemption, so honourable to God, and so suited to the state of man.

When we are led by our affliction to the throne of grace, in the name of the Redeemer, we find at once relief, comfort, and purity. We go, not merely from a cold sense of duty, but from a sense of want and of danger ; and because we find all our happiness in God. In the hour of trial we feel our weakness, and our devotions are quickened by the death of our earthly joys. Are we afflicted ? Let us pray. James v. 13. He who invites us to him will satisfy the longing soul, and fill the hungry soul with goodness. In the day of prosperity we are ready to forget God ; but the storms of adversity shake off our sloth, languor, and indifference, and awaken the flame that was ready to be extinguished. So it was with David, whose devotion was most ardent in the deserts and in the deep waters of tribulation. None of his Psalms breathe a more elevated and spiritual strain of piety than those which he wrote in



the wilderness. In prosperity, while at the fountain-head of public means, he is far from appearing to the same advantage. Blessed then, must that trial be which has led us to the Hearer of prayer.

I speak not merely of prayer for deliverance from trouble. We ought not to seek relief simply, but relief in connection with the honour of God. It was in this way that the suffering Redeemer implored aid and deliverance in the days of his affliction. Matt. xxvii. 39.—42. We cannot, and ought not, to be insensible to pain; and we may desire and use means for relief, provided that we do so in submission to the will of God. We may be heard, though not released from trouble, by being granted a much higher blessing,—namely, grace to support us under our trials, and to make them salutary to our souls. The very compassion of our Father may keep him from removing the bitter draught. It becomes us to remember that creatures entice the heart, and steal it away, as if they could impart happiness; and that afflictions are sent to stop us in our wanderings from genuine enjoyment, and to bring us back to God, the only spring of all true blessedness. Painful as may be our distresses, they are not sent to bereave us of happiness; but to fill us with that bliss which is real and permanent. Hence our prayers for deliverance ought to be accompanied with complete resignation to the providence of God.

Affliction has profited us when it served to be a *monitor*. In the day of prosperity we are ready to forget God and our duty, but adversity reminds us of our ingratitude, of the opportunities we have neglected, the mercies we have despised, and the blessings we have lost. Hosea ii. 8—15, and v. 15. We are by this means in mercy roused from our lethargy, and are excited to double our activity. We hear the voice which says, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” Rom. xiii. 12.

We need to be taught the uncertainty of our most



valued enjoyments, that we may be enabled to enjoy them with a Christian spirit. We are taught this, not by reading and hearing only, but by means of afflictive providences. They serve to bring us into a proper state of mind for receiving instruction, and they make us feel what the Scriptures so strikingly describe. We are made to see that all our earthly enjoyments hang upon a breath—that this scene of vanity is poor indeed—that the Saviour is our only portion and resting place—and that the heavenly temple is our true and everlasting home. Our Father will not indulge us to our ruin: but, loving us more than we do ourselves, he defeats our plans, destroys our fairest and firmest fabrics, wins our affections away from vanity, and gains them to himself.

We derive benefit from affliction when we maintain our confidence in God under its heaviest pressure. In cases the most critical, and, in our view, hopeless, he has the best opportunity for the demonstration of his power, his wisdom, and faithfulness; and for laying a solid foundation for the faith and the hope of his people. He takes pleasure in those who hope in his mercy: and he so arranges his dispensations as best to put our confidence to the test: Hence he led Israel by a circuitous way to Canaan, and exercised their faith in “a land of deserts and of pits—of scorpions and fiery flying serpents.” Deut. viii. 15. Gen. xii. 1—5. Heb. xi. 8, 9, 10. There they were made to feel their dependence on God, and had an opportunity of entirely trusting him. In such circumstances we ought to rely upon him; and, in the confidence of faith, to consult him. We ought never to forget, that, though we know not the particular design of each of his dispensations singly, we well know his grand and ultimate object:—it is “to do us good in our latter end,” that is, in our future and eternal state. It ought to be enough to us that he has promised to be with us, and to do us good. On his word all may be ventured. Abraham acted thus, when he hoped against hope,—when he turned from all that



friends could say—from all that the common course of events indicated ; and left the whole in the hand of God, in the firm persuasion that the promise should be fulfilled. Romans iv. 18—21.

Though the language of Scripture be general, it is applicable to all the varied and ever-varying circumstances of the whole family of God. On this principle the promise of the divine presence made to Joshua is applied to Christians. Joshua i. 5. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. We need not a personal revelation : To look for any thing of this kind is quite enthusiastic. Christians doubtless have often their attention directed to particular passages of Scripture, and have the happiness of drawing from them what they were meant to impart ; but it is the truth contained in them, and not a presumption of their being an immediate revelation to the individual, that produces the effect. The Scriptures speak only of characters ; and if we answer to these characters, we may and ought to consider all that is addressed to them as addressed to ourselves. The people of God form one great family, and the promises made to one are made to all, as far as their circumstances are similar. There are many general assurances in Scripture of the divine favour and kindness, on which our minds ought ever to rest, and which we ought ever to plead at the throne of mercy. Never let us limit the Holy One of Israel ; but, amidst seeming impossibilities, follow the father of the faithful when he offered up Isaac, reasoning thus—“ The Lord who hath promised to bless the nations in the seed of this my son, is able to raise him from the dead, though consumed to ashes.” Heb. xi. 17—19. When all our props are removed, and we are called to walk in darkness, then is the time for discovering our confidence in God, by committing every thing to him. When the drying up of the streams of earthly comfort has had the effect of inducing us to seek our all in him, we have reason to say, that in love he hath afflicted us. Earthly joys are transient,



and often leave a sting behind them ; but the joys of a Christian are pure and progressive.

I would here remind you that there are cases in which the most eminent of the children of God need to have fear as well as love kept alive. We have examples of this in Jacob, David, and Hezekiah, with many more. The afflictions of life serve to keep up a holy fear of our Father : He will not suffer us to wander without being recalled by tribulation : He treats us as children in training for heaven. The discipline of his family includes correction for our faults, and the frowns of a Father are truly hard to bear. The fear of them serves to keep us steadfast in his way. It is not affliction, merely as such, that a Christian dreads, but as the correction of a Father, which, while it expresses his love, also expresses his displeasure. It is well when the smarting discipline of the rod embitters to us the ways of sin. The design of our Father is to expel from us the poison of depravity ; and since we know not all the various modes in which the disorder operates, we are not competent judges of the means he employs. His corrections are adapted also to the place we are destined to occupy, and to our particular tempers, habits, and dispositions as connected with it. Now, we know not all that our Father has in reserve for us in heaven, and so cannot be competent judges of the education he gives us on earth. It is for us, then, to bow to his will with cordial confidence and resignation.

We are warned, you know, against two evils—that of despising the chastening of the Lord, and that of fainting under it. *Heb. xii. 5.* We are chargeable with the former when we do not acknowledge the hand of God in our trials—when we deem them too contemptible to be feared—when, thinking lightly of them, we ask not that aid, without which they cannot be endured with a proper spirit—when we do not look to them as flowing from love to our souls, from displeasure against sin, and from an earnest desire to deliver us from it,



—when we look only to creatures for the aid which we need—when we refuse to abandon the evils we are pursuing—and when we stubbornly refuse to feel and to bow to the will of God. When the heart thus wanders from God, affliction, instead of being salutary, becomes deeply injurious.

On the other hand, we ought not to faint under the rod. We are in danger of running into this error, when endeavouring to avoid the former. In our haste and impatience, we become incapable of calmly considering all circumstances. That we may be preserved from fainting, it is necessary that we grow in faith; for it is unbelief that causes us to sink in the day of adversity. While Moses looked to “him who is invisible,” and had his eye on “the recompense of reward,” he cheerfully endured his many and heavy trials. When the attention of Peter was occupied with the waves only, he instantly began to sink; but had he kept his eye upon his Lord, and had he thought of his character, his mind would have remained in peace, and his security would not have been questioned. Matth. xiv. 28—31. We should beware of so thinking on our afflictions as to exclude the contemplation of our Lord. We err thus when we pore constantly on our trials, without looking to the bright side of the cloud. In this case we assuredly will put a wrong construction on the ways of God, and deprive ourselves of the great encouragement afforded us in Scripture, even in times the darkest and most distressing. The most eminent of the servants of God have erred in this way. Moses did so when “he spake unadvisedly.” Psalm cvi. 32, 33. Even the intrepid Elijah failed when ~~obliged to wander an exile~~, 1 Kings xix. 4. Jeremiah fainted when he suffered under Pashur, Jer. xx. 9. Jacob did so when he said “all these things are against me,” Gen. xlii. 36; and David, when he dreaded that “he should one day perish by the hand of Saul.” 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. How closely do our feelings and steps often resemble these!



We faint under our troubles when we are overcome by surprise and overwhelmed by perplexity—when we give way to dejection and despondency—when we utter heartless complaints, to the discouragement of the weak—when we refuse to be comforted—when we overlook our remaining comforts—when we become indifferent about the afflictions of others—when we become unfit for, or neglect, the duties of our station—and when we indulge in improper views of the dispensations of God, as inconsistent with his love, character, and word. In this state of mind, we are in danger of acting as did Jonah when his gourd was withered. Instead of confiding in God, we become so engrossed with our trials, and so absorbed in meditation on our afflictions, that we overlook and forget the only thing that can relieve and gladden the heart.

Let me exhort you to rise above every thing of this kind, and imitate David when he “encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” 1 Sam. xxx. 6. Seek an increase of faith that your mind may dwell on things unseen and eternal; that spiritual things may ever impress your heart; and that, in beholding the way in which the Lord leads his redeemed, you may be led to give him your entire confidence. You have before you a great cloud of witnesses, who have left their testimony to the faithfulness and the goodness of God, amidst the many evils which they suffered here, but which they have overcome through the energy of faith. The men of this world look only at the things of time, and no wonder that they are overwhelmed by the troubles of this scene; but Christians look beyond them to that world where their elder brother already is, and where they hope soon to be. Miserable, indeed, are they whose views are bounded by time; in whom the sorrow of the world is deeply seated; and in whose spirit it is working death! Think of Ahab, Haman, and Saul; and turn to the many daily instances of wasting constitutions and broken hearts which the face of society presents—and then



dwell on the blessedness of that spirit which bows to the will of God, and finds, even in manifold trials, joy unspeakable and full of glory.

We ought ever to remember in the day of affliction that we suffer less than our iniquities deserve, that the Lord is righteous, for we have sinned, and that it is of his mercies that we are not consumed. It will not do, however, to dwell only on considerations like these, for though we suffer little compared with what is denounced by the law, it is possible that we may suffer more than we would be able long to endure. It is therefore of the first moment to dwell on the promises of a speedy release from our trials. The patience to which we are called is the "patience of hope." "Be patient," say the Scriptures, "for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." James v. 8.

It is not the man who is exempted from tribulation, but the man that endures it, that is pronounced blessed. Take for your example your brethren and companions in tribulation James v. 10, 11. Trace the footsteps of the flock, and you will find that all of them have trodden the path of tribulation. In reading the Scriptures, you will find yourself most interested in the histories of those whose career was the most dark and distressing. In the school of affliction the principles of piety are called forth, tried, and strengthened; as were the excellencies of the Saviour himself. Look to the cloud of witnesses; but look particularly to him, and see in his example, the blissful result of heavy and manifold tribulations. Happy is he, you will then say, whom the Lord correcteth, Psal. xciv. 12; who, by the losses and the crosses of time, is induced to take God for his portion; who is weaned from earthly hopes and worldly dependencies; and is determinately turned to God as the fountain of his happiness. Precious, indeed, is affliction when it cherishes that self-denying, subdued, and heavenly temper of mind, which is the very life of genuine religion; which insures both safety and blessedness in this valley of tears; which purifies and strengthens the heart; and



which assimilates to the character of the Saviour, and to the spirit of the celestial temple. There are qualities of heart which may flourish in seasons of prosperity, but the spirit of which I now speak is best cherished in adversity. It is in the valley of humiliation that those principles grow which assimilate us the most to the Man of Sorrows. We are not qualified for a higher degree of glory than the degree of affliction which we can patiently bear.

Should you be called to duties arduous and painful—according to your day shall be your strength. He who brought his people to the Red Sea, and allowed them to be hemmed in, did so to manifest his power and his goodness. His people were called to stand still and see his salvation. They were called at the moment, of all others the most critical, to go forward. They did so, with the sea before them, in the confidence of safety. It was “to them according to their faith;” for he who had called them to go forward spake and opened a way in the waters. *Exod. xiv.* This is written for our comfort and instruction. He is the same now that he was then. When called to difficult circumstances, let the Lord be our confidence. There is nothing in this bordering on thoughtlessness, insensibility, or enthusiasm. We have the word of our God before us, and there we see the work and the character of Christ; and believing in this, we act under the influence of principles the most rational. The faith of this raises us to the hope of the second coming of the Saviour, and in the prospect of it we are patient and happy in all our tribulations. As the husbandman waits for the fruits of harvest, so do we wait for the fruits of our faith and our afflictions. With us the word of our God ought to be an end of all doubt; and confiding in it, we ought to establish and compose our hearts, in the expectation of that blessed day when the Redeemer “shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.” *James v. 7. 2 Thess. i. 10.* The great thing is to have the Lord himself ever before us; to feel and act under the constant



conviction that he is ever present with us ; and to remember that soon, very soon, we shall be called to his bar. When, through faith, we maintain a resigned and devout spirit, success will follow us in all our ways. But when we fail to persevere in the course of faith and of patience, we shall suffer, as did Moses and Aaron, when, for their evils, they were corrected of God. Numb. xx. 7—12. When the Saviour dwells in our hearts as the object of intense regard, and we continue in the contemplation of our future prospects through him, the mind is elevated above all the interests and the afflictions of time.—We acquire much of the spirit of the many who have travelled the same course before us, and in circumstances far more distressing than any in which we have been placed. That which supported them can also support us ; and in the faith of that word in which they trusted, we shall, as they did, finish our course with joy.

May the God of all consolation bless to you the ways of his providence, by making them all work together for your present and everlasting good. May you find comfort here in the heaviest trials ; and grow in meetness for that state in which sorrow and sighing are unknown, and where bliss unmingled ever flows.

I remain, &c.

## LETTER XII.

### ON OUR LORD'S ANSWER TO THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE.

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou ? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ; but to sit on my right hand,



and on my left is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.—MATTHEW XX. 21,—23

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my last letter I endeavoured to illustrate the goodness of God, by showing you some of the benefits which may be derived from affliction. You would observe that I kept in view the important consideration, that they are designed to affect the character, so as to make meet for heaven. With a special eye to this, I shall now make some remarks on the reply of our Lord to the request of the sons of Zebedee.

The disciples James and John, through the medium of their mother, expressed a desire that they should be granted the honour of sitting, the one on the right and the other on the left hand of their Lord in his kingdom. The request included not merely situations of rank or dignity in general, but the two chief official situations in his kingdom—not merely a high degree of happiness, but the honour of being his principal ministers. This appears from the repetition made, in the 27th and 28th verses, of the rule of precedency which he formerly established, when the disciples were disputing which of them should be greatest; and from the reference which he makes, in verse 25th, to the princes of the Gentiles. It appears also from a similar reference made on the night in which he was betrayed, connected with the promise then given them, that they should sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It is evident that they had very mistaken notions of his character and glory: They thought of an earthly kingdom, while his kingdom is spiritual. But our Lord, without directly entering on the subject of their prejudices, took occasion from their request to exhibit his sufferings as the means of initiation into office, and to state the principles on which the honours of his kingdom should be bestowed. He had no worldly honours to bestow on them. The only promotion which he had to give was to be obtained by suffering and self-denial. Life itself



was to be sacrificed for it. What glory, therefore, could he now have in his eye, but that of the heavenly and future world? The disciples, alas! were too much occupied with present things.

Looking on them, he felt for their ignorance; and in a very gentle and affectionate manner told them, they were not aware of what they asked. His keen feelings on the occasion, arose from the inseparable connection which he well knew subsisted between his sufferings and his advancement to the throne of his kingdom. They had touched a subject, to him of the most tender interest. The principles in man which associate ideas had their influence on him as well as on us; and the thought of the right and the left hand of his throne, led his mind to the awful scenes which he had to encounter before he could ascend it. He had but lately predicted his sufferings, and never were they absent from his thoughts; but still, particular occurrences did at times make them press with more than ordinary power upon his mind. The present was a circumstance much calculated to do so. He now thought of them as the direct appointment of God, in the character of an offended Lawgiver,—as a token of his sacred and mediatorial character,—as an essential part of his consecration to his hallowed office,—and as necessarily distinguished by unutterable severity. He at the same time thought of the resemblance which his people must bear to him as a patient and submissive sufferer, especially in tribulation for the sake of the Gospel, before they could be qualified for the honours, and particularly for the highest honours, of his kingdom. Feeling in this way, he asked his disciples if they could with a proper spirit, go through the previous sufferings necessary to fit them for the places they desired: could they drink of his bitter cup of affliction?—could they be baptized with his baptism of sufferings, as those must be who shall be exalted in his kingdom? They conceived that he spake only of such sufferings as they had already witnessed in him—they were engrossed with the hopes of grandeur and authority, and so did not enter into his



meaning—they also confided too much in their own strength ; and hence were led to reply, that they could.

Our Lord, without directly charging them with their ambitious spirit, and their utter unfitness, whilst they retained their present views, for such sufferings, or with their erroneous notions of the whole matter, replied, that they should indeed participate in a measure in his sufferings ; but that the honours of his kingdom were not to be conferred on the ground of personal or private friendship, so to speak, but on public grounds. As man, he had his particular attachments, though always becoming his character, and John, one of the petitioners, was the beloved disciple ; but in the distribution of the honours of his future kingdom, no private feelings which belonged to him merely as a man, would in the least degree guide him. The places which they asked were prepared of his Father for those two of his disciples who, by means of the deepest participation with him in patient submissive suffering in the cause of truth, and in obedience to the will of God, should be found best qualified for them. He did not mean to say, as the supplement indicates, that the places in question were not his to give : he meant that they were his to give, but that, in giving them, he should be guided, not, as they thought, by private reasons or mere human friendship, but by public reasons ; not taken for an arbitrary appointment, but from the purpose of his Father, who had destined them for the two who should most resemble in character the beloved of his soul.

This appointment, then, is grounded on the connection between character and blessedness. Accordingly, he does not mention the two by name, but simply describes them by their lot, and by their resemblance in principle and spirit to himself. He tells us that they who shall fill the stations in question, shall be the two of his followers who, by being most afflicted here, have had their principles of piety and of benevolence severely tried, and by this means most called forth and invigorated ; and have thus become most like in moral and



spiritual excellence to him who is now a priest upon his throne. The strictest impartiality will mark the decisions of him to whom all judgment is committed. John v. 22, 23. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. He refers particularly to sufferings borne in a course of labour for the truth of God ; but the principle upon which he proceeds is capable of a general application. The Corinthians had reason to rejoice in those common afflictions which were designed to prevent their being "condemned with the world." 1 Cor. xi. 32. When even the ordinary calamities of life cherish and strengthen the principles that adorned the character of Christ, they of course increase our meetness for heavenly glory. It is the end and the effect we are to consider, and not barely the means. Such as are most distinguished by positive holiness shall be best qualified for the highest stations in that kingdom ; the honours and rewards of which are invariably proportioned to the degree in which its subjects are conformed to him who, as the first-born of the family, is seated on the throne of his Father. Hence the Scriptures have connected our fellowship with him in suffering, with our fellowship with him in glory. Rom. viii. 17. 1 Pet. iv. 13.

This was proposing to them a noble object of ambition, in the pursuit of which, instead of being corrupted, they should be purified. The Gospel does not aim at the extirpation of the sense of honour and the desire of glory ; for man was originally formed for honour and dominion in a state of innocence ; and the Scriptures set before us the hope of glory, honour, and immortality, as an incentive to duty. Rom. ii. 7. The promise of God is, "Them that honour me, I will honour;" 1 Sam. ii. 30. ; and the Saviour says, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour." John xii. 26. Shame and disgrace are accordingly represented as among the most painful things in suffering. Ps. lxix. 7—21. Heb. xii. 2. and xi. 36. The sense of honour and the desire of glory, like every other principle in human nature have become corrupted. They are



occupied with sinful and earthly things. Men "glory in their shame," and are ashamed of that which constitutes true glory.

It is the law of Christ's kingdom, however, that he who will be the greatest must be the servant of all. He must imbibe the spirit, and act upon the principles, of him who, though Emmanuel, came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; yea, to give his life a ransom for many. Matt. xxv. 25—28. Luke xxii. 27—29. We see in the Saviour what true glory is. It is not in the least like to what men admire; but is indeed the very opposite to it. Glory is moral and spiritual excellence, in its exercise and display, and in the honour which it justly commands. In a perfect being, the degree of this moral and spiritual excellence corresponds with the degree of his natural faculties. What is the divine glory, but the infinite moral beauty and grandeur of Jehovah? It is this which, when displayed to intelligent beings, excites the emotions comprehended in giving glory to his name. The intrinsic worth of his holy and wise, righteous and gracious perfections, entitle him to all possible love, admiration, and homage. Now, in the Saviour every uncreated and created excellence is to be found: in him all of them are displayed; and to him, in consequence, every knee shall bow. It is in his character, as the image of the invisible God, that the supreme perfection of moral worth is seen; and hence he is termed "the brightness, or the effulgence of his glory." Heb. i. 3.

Jesus stands at the head of the new creation, as did Adam in the old. In the new heaven and the new earth of the second Adam, we see the lost dominion of man more than restored. In him the language of the eighth Psalm is verified, as we are fully taught in the epistle to the Hebrews. Heb. ii. 6—10. In us it will likewise be verified, when we are conformed to him in glory; and to this consummation the Psalm obviously points. Our lost dominion is destined to be restored and extended through the wonderful medium of His



humiliation, and by our conformity to the principles unfolded and glorified by its means. He “was manifested in the flesh” and “made under the law,” in order that, in the character of a servant, he might be perfected for all that government with which he is now invested. In imitation of him, we are called to take up the cross, and, as convicted criminals, to admit the equity of the sentence which dooms us to death; and, abandoning all hope founded on this passing world, cheerfully to follow him in the paths of sorrow and humiliation to the heavenly kingdom. Mark ix. 34—37. Matt. x. 37, 38. Luke xiv. 32. It is thus that we are to deny ourselves to all the false glory of the world, and to seek that which is heavenly and divine. In being conformed to the Man of Sorrows, who, amidst reproach and scorn, endured the cross, despising the shame, and in being thus conformed to the divine character unfolded by him, we attain true glory; because we by this means attain genuine excellence, have the principles of the Saviour exercised in us, and are enabled to display them. With this is connected heavenly enjoyment; for, in beholding the various manifestations of the glory of God, and as so many mirrors reflecting his image, we find ourselves supremely and divinely blessed. How different is the judgment of God from that of man? The translated disciples of the Saviour will be found the only honourable characters on earth in that day, when all shall be seen in a just light. Then the proud and the ambitious of this world, in whose praises history has abounded, will be found mean and contemptible, and covered with shame, while the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Matt. xxiii. 43.

Our Lord, then, presented to his disciples the noblest object of ambition: he sought to cure them of that spirit which led them to look for an earthly kingdom and for earthly honours—which had led one of them to rebuke him when he spoke of his sufferings and death; and which led all of them at last to stumble at his re-



proach and crucifixion. The method he took was that of instructing them in the true nature of his character and kingdom. He illustrates this by directing them to the means by which he should ascend the throne; and by teaching them, that the way to their honours was the same as his—namely, that of humility, patient suffering, and deadness to this world. This was connected with the exhibition of a glory and a blessedness, infinitely exceeding the boasted but exclusive honours and joys of which they were in quest. His eye was upon the joy which was set before himself, even the ineffable blessedness which he now possesses in the contemplation and enjoyment of the divine character, as displayed in his own work, and in the salvation of his people. Now, this is happiness, which is connected with the highest moral excellence and dignity, which worth of character commands, that honour which holy intelligences invariably pay to spiritual glory.

He afterwards drew a contrast between the kingdoms and rulers of this world, and the dignities, offices, and blessings of his kingdom. In it personal or independent dignity and privileges were to be unknown. The greatness of the greatest is connected by him with the duty of condescension and service to the least; and this rule of precedency is enforced by the strongest of all motives—the consideration of his own humiliation. The lesson was not fully received by them at the time; but when the Holy Spirit brought his words to their remembrance afterwards, they came to “glory exclusively in his cross,” and “to rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” Acts v. 41, 42, and xiv. 22. They taught their brethren, that the way to the kingdom of their Father lay “through manifold tribulations”—that the king, their elder brother, had gone that way—that the way was at once safe and honourable, since he had gone before them, and was still with them, to preserve and to guide them—and that, as they now “had fellowship with him in suffer-



ing," so they should ultimately "participate in his glory." 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. By these considerations did they excite their brethren, and stir up their own minds, to seek, "by patient continuance in well-doing, for glory, honour, and immortality." Thus did they seek to withdraw the mind from the transient phantoms of time, by exhibiting an infinitely grander prospect than this world can furnish. Here is an object, in the pursuit of which the noblest and the most hallowed ambition has an "infinite latitude and scope;" an ambition which, the more that it is indulged, assimilates us the more to the God of all excellence.

You will perceive that our Lord does not say, that no such places as the two requested should be granted to any. On the contrary, his answer implies that some two of his disciples should certainly obtain them, though who they shall be, the day of judgment only shall declare. I need not say, then, that the enjoyment of different degrees of glory, and of eminence in honour and dignity, shall certainly obtain in the heavenly world. It must be evident from the answer of our Lord, that such distinctions form a part of the arrangement of God, and are indeed the natural effect of existing character, in that world where bliss is the result of the very nature of things, inasmuch as there, existing principles will be followed by corresponding effects and consequences. He teaches us that the trials of life are meant for our good; because they are designed to assimilate us to God, by chastising, exercising, and so invigorating those sacred principles which include the elements of holiness. They serve to conform us to the Saviour, in whom there is all in which Jehovah delights; and thus do they serve to augment our happiness in the world of light, holiness, and love.

I would here call your attention more particularly to the view which the Lord, in this passage of Scripture, gives of his glory. He has his eye on his official dignity as a priest upon his throne, and on what was necessary to his initiation into office. In order to his be-



ing qualified for the official glory in question, and in order to his subsequent investiture with it, it behoved him to submit to suffering and to death. Both qualification for and investiture with office are, in Scripture, included in consecration to it; and hence much of the importance which is attached to the solemn dedication of official characters. By the baptism of his own blood, as was prefigured by the purification of the priests at their consecration, was the Saviour fitted for, and set apart to, the office of a priest, and that of a mediatory king. In him these two offices are united, Zech. vi. 13. Heb. vii. 17; and hence he connects his sufferings on earth with the whole of his mediatorial glory.\*

He refers also, when he calls his sufferings a baptism, to their uncommon and awful severity. When we consider that by consecration, is meant not only appointment to, but likewise qualification for, office, there appears an obvious reason for adverting particularly to the heavy and severe nature of his many and complicated distresses. By means of them, he was to be fitted for the high official station which he now holds in heaven, and also for the exalted blessedness of which he is there possessed. From the very first of his life below, he was, as Emmanuel, and, as immaculately pure in character, qualified for the work he had undertaken; but as his sufferings called forth, and gave occasion for, the display of every positive excellence, they perfected his consecration. In proportion, of course, to their weight, severity, and complicated nature, was the measure in which the glorious principles of his character were tried; the brightness of the lustre with which they shone, and the degree in which they were invigorated. They were in a certain sense, like "fire to refine the gold;" for though they could not purge away dross or pollution, of which there was none in the immaculate Saviour,

\* See Hebrews ii. 10. and v. 9. compared with chap. viii. 28, where the word rendered "perfect" in the former passages is rendered "consecrated;" and with chap. ii. 6-9. where suffering is connected with his dominion.



they served to increase the positive preciousness of his moral and spiritual glories. As he grew in stature and in intellectual endowments, so did he in every holy and benevolent principle. Luke ii. 52. Isaiah xi. 1—4. The hallowed excellencies of his character were, in particular, eminently increased, through the means of his sufferings; for in him, as in us, that law of nature by which the trial and exercise of a principle adds to its vigour, had its uniform influence. Viewing, then, the excruciating sorrows and inconceivable agonies which awaited him, he calls them a baptism,—to express at once their *sacred* and *overwhelming* nature. Even under the immediate hand of God, his love to his Father, his zeal for his glory, his veneration for his excellence, his abhorrence of sin as opposed to his will, and his love to righteousness as the ornament of his perfections, were all in full and highest exercise, and in the most vivid light exhibited the glory of his character. His love to God was not exercised merely in circumstances of ease and enjoyment, but burned with the warmest fervour and the brightest lustre under all the floods of tribulation that the mighty hand of Heaven poured upon his soul. It glowed in his breast even under the heaviest sorrows, and the deepest depression which the divine dereliction could produce in a mind sustaining at the very time the attacks of earth and of hell. Never, surely, was love so tried: never was it so displayed.

Here shone also the kindled flame of love to men, even in all their guilt and pollution. His sufferings must have excited in his mind the most lively ideas of his people; and of the miseries to which they were liable. Their character also must have been viewed by him with the deepest concern. His love, however, did not decline when thus tried. On the contrary, the benevolent feelings of his heart were the more excited and invigorated. Hence the Scriptures dwell particularly on his cross and agonies, as affording the most advantageous station for taking a distinct view of his illustrious



character. In this way was he fitted for the situation he now fills as a priest upon his throne.

He ascended heaven to the Father, having many brethren, and there he exhibited the very elements of the divine life, in fully unfolding the Father's principles and principles, which governed himself in the days of his flesh. Here too, he, by the same action, depicted the character of man; the nature and form of sin; and the nature and object of the divine law. In exhibiting his love to God and his love to sinners, as manifested in his sacrifice, he secured the confidence of all in his heavenly ministrations. By these principles, as developed and brightened in the furnace of affliction, and by his relation to both parties, was he qualified for the great work of mediating between the lawgiver and the guilty children of Adam. When in the invisible world of angels and departed spirits, he in effect declared, that not the smallest part of his unparalleled woes could have been spared; that, in all his pain, and in all his agonies, he bowed to the will of God; unquestionably his declaration must have come home to all hearts with irresistible energy; must have enlarged their views of the divine character; and must have added to their joys. In this consummation of his mediatory work God delights, and has expressed his delight and approbation by calling him to the throne of his glory.

Connected with his advancement to honour, is his advancement to bliss. His soul now rests in the full and everlasting enjoyment of the divine communion manifested in his work. He is exultant for this joy as Mediator, by means of his characterable sufferings; because they brought him into the nearest and most intimate union with the divine character, and illustrated his glory. The principles exercised by him when afflicted by his God, contain the very elements of his present happiness. As Mediator, he exhibited the splendour of the divine glory in his obedience unto death; in his official ministrations he still displays it;



land in that, which is thus manifested, his soul rests with ineffable delight. The palace of the celestial temple, and the fountain of his glory and the springs of his love. The melody of the heavenly song of the redeemed is: "By this word he justified himself and washed us from all unrighteousness. For as much let him be exalted and glorified in heaven." He who emptied himself of power, and assumed the form of a servant; who, though rich, for our sakes became poor; who stooped to become the object of scorn; who was crucified through apparent weakness; and who became a curse for us — so glorified worthy to receive all power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Rev. x. 9—14. Such is the song of holy creatures; and such is the judgment of God, the true Judge of excellencies, and the best acquainted with the Redeemer. All serve to show that his glory and his life arise from his humiliation and his work on earth.

Alas, my dear friend, to contrast these views with the two important considerations, that there will be different degrees of glory among the redeemed in heaven; and that the way in which they shall be fitted for this eternal inheritance, will be that of being in their present condition, to the Resurrection of the Man of Sorrows. This one who shall stand at his right hand and on his left hand, shall be the one who shall have drunk most deeply of his own sufferings, and shall have been most united with his persecutors. He is the principal, who shall be the general, from the highest to the lowest in the kingdom of glory. All in heaven shall measure by him, and shall be made like him. This is the nature of all true glory, and all true happiness, not only so, but all true glory and all true happiness, a far more abundant and more glorious than any other. They do so, by drawing the whole of their glory from the source of all glory and all happiness, from the Father, and so making it a more abundant and more glorious than any other source and design of it. If the sufferings of life work out for us far higher blessedness, I need not say that



there must be a diversity of glory in heaven. It is true that the apostle is not comparing the future glory of one Christian with that of another, but rather the afflictions of life with future blessedness : Yet, as the latter is said to be wrought out by the former, there must be a proportion between them. The passage then indirectly teaches, that there shall be a diversity of degrees in future glory. It is evident that, if the Christian who is removed from earth almost as soon as he receives the truth, shall possess the same weight of glory with those who have suffered long and severely in the cause of God, it cannot be said that the trials of the latter have wrought out for them what they shall enjoy. In that case, their bliss were quite irrespective of their sufferings.

In proportion to the measure in which we are conformed to the hallowed principles which the sufferings of the Saviour called forth and exercised, is the measure in which we are capacitated for high degrees of conformity to him in glory. The same means which brightened his character are necessary to purify and sanctify ours. It is the battle that tries the courage of the soldier : It is adversity that proves the character, and shows what we are. Nor do the sufferings of life serve only for the display of our principles ; they contribute also to their growth. Every principle in the mind is invigorated by frequent exercise. Resistance and opposition call forth the powers of the soul, and give birth to exertion. Every victory we obtain increases our strength and our courage, and prepares us to renew the conflict. When the character is perfected, we shall not need to be afflicted : then we shall dwell where there is no sorrow nor pain.

There is indeed one great difference between the Redeemer's sufferings and ours : his afflictions not only perfected the display of his character, and are a pattern to us ; they also made atonement for sin ; whereas the sufferings of his people can never in the smallest degree expiate transgression. The only expiatory sacrifice is



What of Christ : on it his redeemed rest their hope, and from it they derive their peace. But having believed the Gospel, and having found rest to their souls in the blood of the cross, the desire of conformity to their Lord is powerfully excited. This desire is gratified by making the afflictions, and indeed all the events of life, the means of trying and exercising the principles of piety and benevolence ; and so of forming and finishing that holy character, which it is the desire of Christians to possess, and with which happiness is inseparably connected.

The blessedness of the redeemed is not the same with that enjoyed by man in paradise : it springs from the character of God as unfolded in the Gospel, and which could never have been fully developed but by such means as the cross of Christ exhibits. It is happiness resulting from a character formed in the school of affliction. Not that the mere endurance of pain will sanctify the soul : far from it. On the contrary, afflictions often harden the heart. But when, through the Divine blessing, they lead to the Gospel, and so cherish the hallowed principles which adorned the humiliation of Christ, they serve in us, as well as in him, to complete the character ; and so to increase our capacity for that bliss which fills the celestial temple, and is a participation in the happiness of God.

If, then, the most exalted in heaven shall be those of the family of God who have had most fellowship with the Saviour as a sufferer ; we see at once how it is that " whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and how he scourgeth that son most severely whom he intends most to honour and to bless," Heb. xii. 6. He does this with a view to eternity ; and not merely with a general view to their future good, but with an eye to their individual character, and to the particular place he designs for them in the heavenly temple. He acts from love the most wise and ardent, and overlooks their present momentary feelings from a kind regard to their eternal glory. Surely this is well calculated to excite



our love to him; to call forth patience and confidence, and to produce meek resignation and animating joy. His eye is ever upon us; and all the painful trials of life with which we are visited, will work together for our good both here and in the world to come. Rom. viii. 28.

You may perhaps suppose, my dear friend, that many have scarcely any afflictions, who yet appear to be eminent Christians. There is a mistake here. This is a world of evil and of pain; and many who appear to have but little to annoy them, have not a few unseen distresses. Tribulation is not confined to sickness, disease, losses, and the many visible disappointments of life. Could we look into the breasts of the most prosperous, we should see proofs of this. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." I wish you to observe, however, that it is not merely the *quantum* of affliction that regulates the measure of glory, but the *spirit* with which it is endured. Two men may have the same degree of affliction, while one of them bears it with but little of Christian principle, and the other with a high measure of the mind of Christ. One man may have a great burden of tribulation, and another may have comparatively but light trials to bear. The latter, however, may profit more by his afflictions than the former. The very weight of his trials may occasion in the one much of an improper spirit, while the humility, the diffidence, and the piety of the other may be called forth and exercised in "casting his lighter burden on the Lord." Afflictions do not of themselves sanctify: They are but means; and the effect depends on the Divine blessing. Of course, the kindness of God is seen, not in the measure of affliction only, but in what, through his blessing, it is made to produce.

It is delightful to follow the Saviour as he advances through his sufferings to that bliss and that glory into which he hath gone, as our forerunner. If for us he hath gone to heaven by the path of affliction, ought not we to follow him? Shall we seek for glory, and



refuse or be unwilling to go to it in the way in which he went to it? Is there not a happiness in sharing his lot? Ought not every principle of generosity to induce us cheerfully to follow him in his course of tribulation? Nor is this all. In the day when his glory shall be revealed, how shall we rejoice in being called to communion with him in his exalted bliss! The disciple who bears the greatest resemblance to him who is the first-born of the redeemed family, and the express image of the divine character, is the child whom the King delighteth to honour. With this prospect in view, we may well be reconciled to our trials here; and rejoice in the demonstrations of the divine goodness given in embracing our eternity in the events of time; and in afflicting us, that we may be made partakers of his holiness. What, then, is it to seek by patient continuance in well doing, for glory, honour and immortality? It is not to look for mere pomp or empty dignity. It is to seek to add knowledge to knowledge of the most exalted and hallowed nature, strength to strength in every holy principle—feature to feature of the divine character; in a word, it is to persevere in advancing to the highest intellectual and moral perfection. What is this but to aim at the possession of genuine excellence of character, and of that heavenly glory which is not merely something without us, but is the union of the soul with God, and such communion of views—such endearing intercourse, and such oneness of heart with Him, as will assimilate our nature to His, and admit us to fellowship with Him in his blessedness?

There is another view of the connection between present evils and future bliss, to which I beg your attention. We are in the habit, you know, of judging of the present by contrasting it with the past. On this principle the misery of the rich man in the parable is represented as aggravated by the remembrance of his former condition of ease and enjoyment; and the bliss of Lazarus as in some measure increased by the recollection of his afflictions on earth, Luke xvi. 19—31.



Present bitters will make future sweets the sweeter : The difficulties of the way in which we have been led—the labours, conflicts, sufferings, and hardships to which we were called in this valley of tears—and the losses and disappointments incident to this fleeting scene, will heighten our happiness, and endear to us our peace, security, and triumph.

The redeemed are accordingly represented as blessing God for their redemption, “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,” Rev. vii. which implies a retrospective view of their several conditions on earth, and that each remembered the various circumstances of his lot. Indeed, if, at the tribunal of Christ, all our works shall undergo a scrutiny, those works must be brought to our remembrance ; and with them every thought, sensation, and word, with which as motives and consequences, they were connected ; so that in the nature of things, the knowledge which we have acquired here can never be lost. If not lost, it must answer some useful purposes ; among which the one I now refer to may not be the least.

This serves also to illustrate the subject of different degrees of glory. The innumerable multitude of the redeemed have not all experienced the same kinds and measures of affliction,—yea, perhaps, no two have in every respect sustained the same trials : It must be evident, then, that their recollections in heaven will be exceedingly diversified. The kind of enjoyment resulting from such recollections cannot be the same in all ; for, surely, it will not be said, that in heaven there shall be any mistakes as to the past, any more than as to the present. Nothing merely ideal shall there enter into the causes of our happiness.

I shall now advert to another circumstance in the reply of our Lord, which throws light on the subject of diversities in future blessedness. He represents heaven as a social state, and the redeemed as forming an organized body, in which different members perform different functions. The two disciples asked, as I have said, not



merely the highest degrees of enjoyment, but of official rank ; and the answer of our Saviour certainly admits that something analogous to distinctions of the kind shall obtain in heaven. Indeed, the very nature of a social state requires this : I mean not the formal distinctions of office, strictly so called, but distinctions sufficiently resembling these, to justify the use of the language descriptive of the one in illustrating the nature of the other. In order to the enjoyment of the benefit of society, it is not enough that there is a multitude in the same place : There must besides this be an interchange of thought, sentiment, and feeling. If all have in every respect the same original and acquired endowments—if the talents of each have been exercised in precisely the same way—if each one has the same degree of knowledge, and the same measure of every positive excellence—if the same emotions are to the same extent, in every breast—and if all have the very same recollections, it must be evident that, in such a body; every individual would see but himself in his brother ; no new idea could be communicated by one to another ; no new sensation could be excited, and of course no new enjoyment imparted. There would be a perfect monotony ; and the friendship strengthened by companionship would be unknown. The happiness enjoyed would be independent of social intercourse. Such is not a state, surely, in which could be enjoyed the perfection of that which is necessary to gratify our natural and strong desire of society.

But in the other view of the subject, there is seen a foundation for the perpetual growth of each individual in every possible excellence, through the constant exercise of every faculty and of every principle of the mind. In heaven, as well as on earth, social intercourse will form a medium through which we shall be enabled to serve one another ; for when other means of usefulness shall fail, because no longer necessary, “ love shall abide for ever.” Yes ; in heaven that love which “ abideth,” 1 Cor. xiii. 8—13. will, in a social state,



have wide and everlasting scope for unremitting exertion,—and so shall we share in the bliss of him whose love is unceasingly in action. There the body of *Christ* will be completely organized; and the different members in their respective places will, as guided by the great Head, contribute to the good of the whole. Heaven is a state of *activity*, Rev. xii. 3; a place where happiness is communicated, as well as enjoyed,—and of course must include the delightful and everlasting union of obedience to the two great and inseparable commandments of the law.

Sweet is this view of heavenly bliss! It does not in the least interfere with the delightful prospect of having all in God; for each of his people will be a mirror in which he will be seen; and in contemplating the redeemed company, who, in reflecting the likeness of their elder brother, will reflect the image of their God, the divine glory will be enjoyed, and will also have an increasingly transforming influence. There the enjoyment of God, and fellowship with his people, will reciprocally affect and increase each other.

The sum of the whole is—that future bliss will spring from character. This character must be formed here; for the happiness of heaven is but the perfection of that holiness which, even in this world, distinguishes the people of God. Every thing in this arrangement is honourable to the Saviour, and reflects the highest lustre on the glory of his kingdom. How delightful the contemplation of his grandeur as a Priest upon his throne, surrounded by the innumerable hosts of the saved, who have all been made kings and priests by fellowship with him; and who all, from the two on his right hand and on his left, down to the least in the kingdom of heaven, “cast their crowns at his feet!” Let this animating prospect, which is at once so worthy of God, and so adapted to our immortal spirits, stimulate us to unremitting exertion. However painful and distressing our lot may be; whatever may be the sacrifices we are called to make—all sinks into utter insignificance when



compared with this. How soothing the thought that, in proportion to the measure of our present afflictions, and the degree in which they conform us to the Redeemer in principle, will be our height in glory and in bliss !

Allow me to comfort with you these words.—Study with interest this cheering subject, and seek that the Lord would enable you to imbibe all the consolation it is fitted to impart. Meditate on the cross and glory of Christ, and pray that all the events of life may serve to work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of blessedness. Live by faith in the atonement, and be, like Paul, determined to endure and sacrifice all, that by any means, however painful or costly, you may attain the bliss connected with the resurrection of the dead, Phil. iii. 11. This will know no end. Every step in it will be a promise of bliss yet greater, and an earnest of glory yet higher. He who is the fountain of this blessedness is the same of whom it is said, “Canst thou by searching find out God ? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ?” Job xi. 7. Who then can set a limit to the extent of that fulness of happiness to which the redeemed may ascend in their incessant approaches to him who dwells in light inaccessible and full of glory ? Or who will say that a limit can be set to the degree in which their souls can be irradiated with his lustre, and reflect his likeness ? Is there not room for an eternal progress in the knowledge and enjoyment of “Him who is, who was, and who is to come ?” May we not be for ever brightening with advancing moral glories, to the honour of Him with whose holy beauties we shall be adorned ?

Look then for the day when all darkness shall flee away, and when the effulgence of the light of the divine favour which shines upon the Saviour, will fill you with unutterable delight. Praying that the Lord may be with your spirit, I remain, &c.



## LETTER XIII.

## ON THE DIVERSITY OF DEGREES IN GLORY.

General remarks—Future blessedness the result of the divine approbation, of the approving testimony of conscience, of being blessings to others, and of an enlarged capacity for spiritual enjoyments—The diversity of rewards explicitly taught in Scripture—Consistent with salvation by grace—The works rewarded, the fruits of divine favour—The reward bestowed for the sake of Christ—Is an addition to the general blessing of Redemption—Is a display of the divine love to righteousness—Is not an arbitrary gift, but the natural effect of existing principles—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE sometimes heard you speak of the different degrees of glory which shall be enjoyed in heaven. There is something very gratifying to the mind in an inquiry of this nature; and I am satisfied that the views which you and I entertain respecting it, have a clear support in the constitution of the divine government and in the Holy Scriptures. There is nothing in the diversity of rewards inconsistent with the doctrine of salvation by grace. No creature certainly can ever merit any good thing at the hand of the Creator. I do not mean sinful creatures only, but even such as have continued uniformly obedient. Their faculties are the gift of free bounty, and the blessings they enjoy are the same. They must ever be under the highest obligations to love and serve God; and when they have discharged every duty, they are required to say, "We are unprofitable servants," Luke xvii. 9, 10. This however, is not inconsistent with Christians being rewarded according to their works. The nature of the reward itself, and the circumstances connected with its bestowment, will show this.

All the saved are alike redeemed through the atonement of Jesus; they are all equally the children of God through union with him; and, as such, they are all



joint heirs of God with him. It does not follow, however, that the enjoyments of each will be to the same extent. Are not they all as much the purchase of the same blood, and heirs of the same inheritance now as they shall be hereafter ? and yet they are far from being upon an equality. If their common privileges are consistent with the diversity which we see in this life, are we to suppose that their enjoyment in the next must, in all respects, be the same, because of their interest in those privileges ? In the nature of things this cannot be. Redeemed infants, for example, are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and will sing eternally the praises of redeeming grace ; but their sensations cannot in *all* respects be the same as shall be felt by Christians who have actively served God in their day and generation. An infant, snatched from the womb to the grave, may be happy in the contemplation and praises of divine grace ; but surely cannot experience the transporting feelings of Paul, when he appears with his numerous converts as his joy and his crown. Unless we admit this, how can there be any meaning in those passages of Scripture which speak of the happiness of such as have been honoured to turn sinners unto God ? The thief called upon the cross, entered that day into paradise, and was blessed with the presence and enjoyment of Jehovah ; but not having been spared to associate with the people of God, to minister to them, and labour with them, he cannot participate in the sensations of those who have long laboured and suffered in the cause of truth. In the very nature of things, then, there must be a difference betwixt the enjoyments of some and those of others.

In order to understand this subject, it is of the first importance to distinguish between a change of state and a change of character. In regard to the former, all Christians are on a level. The latter, however, admits of a distinction between freedom from sin, and the degree of positive excellence ; and though all are certainly equal as to the former, they may not be so in respect of the latter. It ought ever to be remembered also, that



Christian services are not paid as a price for a reward : they are the free offerings of love and of gratitude, and the spontaneous expression of regard to worth. The reward is found in the service, and will be perfectly enjoyed when the principles which now excite to obedience shall have reached maturity, and shall have found full scope in the world of light. If there be an exquisite pleasure found in pleasing even but an earthly friend, must there not be a still higher gratification in serving, in however humble a manner, the Deliverer of our souls and the Author of all our mercies ? Is there not an exquisite pleasure in expressing veneration for worth, and particularly the worth of our best and tried benefactor ?

The reward, my dear friend, of the kingdom of heaven, will partly consist in the divine approbation of our services. The Scriptures often mention this branch of it. Mal. iii. 16. Matth. x. 32. and xxv. 21, 23. 2 Cor. v. 9. Even in this life we feel happy when our conduct meets the approbation of those whom we esteem : how much more delightful must it be to have the approbation of Him whose understanding is our Father, and whose love to righteousness and truth corresponds with their excellence ? Our joy in the address, "Well done, good and faithful servant," will be heightened on the day of Christ, by the clear perception we shall have of the wisdom, rectitude, and dignity of Jehovah. We shall then know the value of his smiles, and prize them the more. There is something exquisitely pleasing to an ingenuous mind, in having an opportunity of expressing and manifesting gratitude to a benefactor ; and this pleasure must be increased when such expressions are acknowledged and applauded. Now, the circumstances of the righteous fully correspond with these views. Here their deeds are often unnoticed,—their alms are not seen of men,—many benevolent acts they perform in silence,—and much of their intercourse with God is in secret : here also their words are often misconstrued ; many of their best deeds are turned to reproach ; their principles and motives are misrepresented, and their characters traduced. But how honourable will be the



view given of them in the day of Christ ! Then the judgment of God concerning their works and their character will confound the ungodly. He will bring to light their secret deeds of piety and mercy, and will set in its proper light all that had been misrepresented. Then will the Lord vindicate his people, and it will be seen and confessed by all, that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour. Matth. x. 25, 26. 2 Cor. iv. 5. Prov. xii. 26.

It must be evident, however, that different portions of commendation must be awarded to various degrees of excellence. Among the children of Israel, Caleb and Joshua stood pre-eminent ; they not only upon the whole followed the Lord, but they followed " him fully ;" and a suitable mark of distinction was granted them, Numb. xiv. Abraham was called the friend of God : Moses is praised for one excellence, and David for another : Enoch was distinguished, even among the faithful of his day, and was translated to heaven without tasting death : among the seven thousand who had not bowed to the image of Baal, Elijah was conspicuous ; and, as a mark of approbation, as well as for other purposes, he too was translated : all the eleven disciples were objects of our Lord's complacency ; but Peter, James, and John, were particularly so, and accordingly they were distinguished by special favours. On the mount of transfiguration they exclusively obtained a view of the glory of their Lord, and of the high honour conferred on Moses and Elijah. Of these chosen three, again, John was the most esteemed by his Master. And when we think of the character of Christ, we must be satisfied that the man who was most like to himself must have been " the disciple whom Jesus loved." Similarity of disposition appears particularly in the tenderness and affection which distinguished John. Who can fail to see this in his narrative of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, and in his epistles, where the spirit of love breathes in every line ? His soul and that of the man Christ Jesus were knit together. He



had the principal place of honour, and leaned on the bosom of his Master at table.

In reading the epistles to the seven Asiatic churches, we find that some of them are praised for many excellencies, while at the same time they are blamed for certain deficiencies and evils; and that others receive unmingled approbation. But among the former class, some are praised for this excellence, and others for that—some are blamed for one thing, and some for another; and of the latter the commendation bestowed upon the one church is not the same with that bestowed upon its neighbour. The measure of approbation is proportioned to the degree in which they were free from sin, and to the kinds and the measure of the excellencies of their character. Rev. ii. iii. In the day of the Lord, all our sins shall be declared forgiven; but as what needs pardon cannot be approved of, so the defects and the evils found in us must prevent us from receiving the same degree of approbation with those who have walked more consistently. In so far again as our character shall be approved, forgiveness will not be called for; and in proportion to the excellence of our principles and deportment, and to the degree in which we have been distinguished by them, will be the award of our applauding Judge.

In the parable of the pounds, Luke xix. 13—26. the reward of the servants is represented as proportioned to the measure of the profits they had gained. The sum given to both was the same, but their improvement of it was different. The one, accordingly, whose pound had gained ten pounds had the government of ten cities given him; while he who had gained but five pounds received the government of but five cities. In so far as the future reward consists in approbation, it is proportioned, as in this parable, to the degree of diligence and fidelity,—the different degrees of glory being marks of different degrees of complacency. But where, as in the parable of the talents, Matth. xxv. 14—30. there is a difference in the original number be-



stowed, while each is faithful to what he receives, then in so far as the reward consists in approbation, all are on a level. But though the divine commendation is a part, and a very delightful part of the reward, it is not the whole of it; so that in other respects the difference of talents will be connected with different degrees of positive bliss. This distinction it is of importance particularly to remember. It is clear from these parables that future blessedness will not be the direct result of ~~one cause only,~~ but of several. One Christian, then, may have an equal share with another of what flows from some of these, though not an equal measure of what proceeds from others of them. In the moral as well as in the natural world, God does nothing without some ulterior end. When, therefore, he enables a Christian to attain a high measure of that excellence which is the object of his greatest complacency in heaven as well as on earth, he must design by this means to bring him to that state of future glory for which his character hath fitted him.

We are taught in Scripture, my dear friend, that another part of heavenly blessedness will consist in the approving testimony of conscience. In the present life this is a source of heartfelt joy. Paul often found it so when he was reviled. 2 Cor. i. 12. and vii. 2, 3. 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11. No outward circumstances can disturb the peace which it yields. Now the pleasure arising from it must be in proportion to our sense of the value of truth and integrity; and the strength of our conviction that the Lord has every claim upon our obedience. In the other world, our perceptions of these will be clear and impressive; and our happiness will of course be proportionably great. Beholding the glory of God, we shall be delighted that we were in any way honoured to serve him. Knowing our obligations to the Redeemer, who loved us and gave himself for us, it will gladden our hearts that we were in any measure enabled to express our gratitude, and to proclaim his goodness. Acts xx. 24, and xxi. 13.

It will greatly enhance this part of our bliss that our



good works shall be adduced, not only as proofs of our faith and love, but to refute the calumnies of his enemies; and to vindicate the character and tendency of that Gospel which they have represented as a system leading to licentiousness. How pleasing will be the testimony of conscience to our having walked so as to adorn the doctrines of Christ! How delightful to have been enabled thus to vindicate the character of God, and to justify the decisions of Heaven in the breast even of the condemned! When we shall see the Saviour in all his excellence and glory, how transporting the reflection, that we have been honoured to bear his image, and to forward that for which he bled and for which he reigns! It must be clear, from every just view of Christian principle, that when we come to see the magnitude of our deliverance, and of the prize of eternal life, the measure of this part of our bliss must keep pace with the degree in which we have been enabled to serve and glorify the Redeemer.

The reward will also consist in the happiness of seeing others profited by our labours and sufferings. Paul exulted in the prospect of this. He looked with triumph to the day when he should appear with the seals of his ministry, "as his joy and crown of rejoicing." 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. To a benevolent and philanthropic mind, such a reward must be unspeakably delightful. It is pleasing to be employed in relieving even the bodily wants and distresses of men. The pleasure resulting from this no sensualist or selfish character can understand. How delightful to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, a stay to the fatherless and the orphan, and a comfort to the heart of the widow! But what is this when compared with the deliverance and bliss of the soul? Every thing that shows the value of an immortal spirit—the importance and indispensable necessity of the salvation of Christ—the excellence and glory of heavenly bliss—together with the glorious effects which flow from the redemption of the guilty, must heighten our estimation of this reward. Nor need any Christian, however obscure, say that this is an



honour to which it were in vain for him to aspire. Every individual has a sphere of action ; and success is not the favoured lot of one class only. Let all labour in their respective circles ; and, through the divine blessing, they shall participate in the joy of those who turn many to God. A holy walk, a word seasonably dropt, or an advice tenderly and faithfully given, may issue in leading one or more to the Saviour. James v. 19, 20. These may lead others, by whom again more may be benefited ; and the work may go on progressively to the end of all things. This cannot fully be seen while we are below ; but the result will appear to our joy in the world of light. In the day of the Lord, all that has flowed from our conduct, our exertions, and our sacrifices, will be discovered and acknowledged, to the unspeakable augmentation of our bliss. John iv. 36, 37, 38.

While the primitive servants of God ascribed the whole success of their labours to him, they did not overlook their own instrumentality. They were far from magnifying themselves, but they magnified their office, Rom. xi. 13. 2 Cor. ii. 14—17. The more they felt the importance of their work, the more did they labour with humility and zeal. The moment we undervalue the use of means, our exertions decline, and we sink into apathy and slothfulness. But when we diligently employ the talents we possess, and improve the opportunities we enjoy, we may anticipate, in dependence on the divine blessing, the most important results. Thus Paul, in the prospect of visiting the Christians at Rome, said, “ I am sure that when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ.” This confidence was founded on the experience he had of the power of the truth, and of the presence of God to give it effect in his hands, Rom. xv. 29. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. and 11—16. While the apostles and others laboured together in the vineyard of God, and in building his temple, each expected a reward which he might call “ his own ;” because it should be



“according to his *own* labour.” Paul, addressing the Corinthians, says, “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one; and every man shall receive his *own* reward, according to his own labour. For we are fellow-labourers of God: Ye are God’s husbandry; ye are God’s building,” 1 Cor. iii. 7, 8. The planter and waterer are said to be one, because they jointly carried on one work, and were actuated by the same godlike and benevolent aim. The confident hope of the apostle was, that God would not forget their labours of love, but would certainly treat each according to his services. There is great precision used in distinguishing the reward of Paul from that of Apollos; the reward of Cephas from that of both, and that of the whole three from the reward promised every underbuilder. Now, why all this reasoning, and this exact proportioning, if all are to be alike rewarded, irrespective of different kinds, lengths, and degrees of labour and of suffering?

Paul, speaking of those who had been converted by his means, calls them “his work in the Lord,” “his joy and his crown,” Phil. iv. 1. and “his rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus,” 2 Cor. i. 14. Such as laboured in the Gospel were warned by him to take care of adding improper characters to the churches. They were told, that those added to them by their instrumentality should, if they stood the test, be their joy and crown of rejoicing; but if they did not, they should “suffer loss,” in as much as they would not have the fruits of their labour to present, “perfect in Christ Jesus.”\* On this principle, Paul warns his beloved

\* In 1 Cor. iii. 7—20. (the passage referred to here,) Paul is not speaking of doctrines, but characters. He represents the Church as a building, and there is here no mixture of metaphor. Every Christian is a living stone in this sacred temple; and particular churches ought to consist only of such as appear to be united to Christ, the foundation-stone. If any underbuilders shall add to the Churches characters who are not Christians, they are adding materials, which, like wood, hay, and stubble, are unfit for such edifices. They will not stand the fire of the future judgment. The precious jewels and unperishing metals of which the Church of



Philippians to hold forth the word of life, that he might in the day of Christ rejoice that he had not run in vain, neither laboured in vain, Phil. ii. 16. These declarations accord with the promise, that "they who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever," Dan. xii. 3. They are fitted to animate not public characters only, but all Christians, with zeal for the best interests of men.—Let every one, then, do in this work what he can, in the hope of a blessed and god-like reward.

There must be a great difference between the enjoyment of the man who enters heaven without having profited even one soul, and that of him who is accompanied by a flock of converts from the world, or of believers who had been edified and comforted by his means. In the latter case, they crowd around him as he enters, or follow him in succession into that world where "not a cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall pass unrewarded." This is to enter into the joy of our Lord—even that joy, the prospect of which animated him to endure the cross and to despise the shame, Heb. xii. 2. In proportion to our love to the divine character, and our benevolence towards men, must be the bliss resulting from such a scene. This made Paul willing to remain in this world of evil, while he knew that in other respects it was better to depart and to be with Christ, Phil. i. 23—26. In this act of self-denial, he displayed a highly refined and elevated soul; a spirit, the very reverse of what is low and mercenary; and a temper of heart the most devout and benevolent.—Love is to be estimated by the grandeur, the capacity, and the duration of its object,—and what can equal that which regards the salvation of souls?

Christ is composed, as we see in Isaiah liv. 11—13. Rev. xxi. 16—24, will alone stand this test. Should a labourer have erred, through ignorance or inadvertence, he himself shall be saved,—provided he stand the trial of fire, by which he, as well as his work, must be tried..



This reward includes in it an enlarged capacity for contemplating and enjoying divine things. There is an increasing meetness for the heavenly world attainable here. Those who have drunk most deeply into the spirit of Jesus have a proportionate capacity for comprehending the height and the depth, the breadth and the length, of the building of mercy. They are the more fitted for entering into the wonders of redeeming love, and for receiving the fulness of God. It is not, indeed, conceivable what connection our future state could have with our present, if the attainments which we acquire here were to be absolutely useless hereafter. In the government of his creatures, the Almighty invariably makes one acquirement the means of gaining another. His wisdom always adjusts the means in a fit proportion to the end he designs, and likewise adapts the end to the means he employs. The present state, accordingly, is the seed time; the future will be the harvest. All that we do, and all that happens to us here, have an effect upon our views and our dispositions. Every instance of this kind leads to another, so that we are always in progress, either to greater degrees of evil, or higher degrees of good. In regard to both, there are great differences among men here, and as the same connection between existing attainments and future progress will be continued, their must be differences among them hereafter. Different degrees of glory will naturally result from a diversity of capacity for entering into the deep things unfolded in the Gospel. This appears to be what is taught in the parable of the pounds, where the pound of the slothful servant is said to be given to him whose one had gained ten. He whose principles had been most exercised, had attained a proportionally greater fitness for still higher and more extended services and honours; and on this account it was meet that to him, rather than to another, this additional means of improvement should be given. We are here presented with two characters of equal talents, but whose talents have not been equally exer-



cised, so that the attainments of the one are much beyond those of the other. And as every degree of attainment capacitates for still greater acquirements, we are very properly taught that, as the mind becomes imbued with divine things, and rises in excellence, new means for exercise, and consequently additional blessedness, will be granted to it. In the heavenly state, there will be room for the perpetual exercise and improvement of Christian principle. The object of knowledge and enjoyment is infinite; and such is the nature of an immortal spirit, that it cannot be happy unless perpetually advancing. If, then, the mind shall be for ever enlarging, it is not conceivable how our happiness could be relatively perfect, if in heaven our knowledge of God and his ways were to be absolutely stationary. From the first moment of our introduction to it we shall indeed be freed from all contrariety to the Saviour; but positive resemblance to him is capable of perpetual increase, as our minds are expanded, and his glorious character unfolded. Since the happiness of an intelligent and spiritual being arises from the new discoveries of truth, and from the exercise of holy principles in appropriate actions, the consciousness of such a perfection of mind, and of objects for its exercise, as qualifies for perpetual progress in knowledge and piety, must excite the strongest sensations of joy, as opening the prospect of interminable bliss.

I am here led to make a remark or two on the parable of the talents. As the pound of the slothful servant was given to the more faithful of the two rewarded servants, so, in the other case, the talent of the unfaithful servant is given to him who had the most talents, but who had not greater fidelity than the other—in fidelity they were equal. We are taught by this, that among even the faithful servants of God the degree of positive holiness will keep pace with their endowments, and with the degree in which they have been spiritually exercised. Apply this to the diversity of mental powers. I do not mean that such are the only talents intended;



but they doubtless form one kind of them, and I refer to them *merely* for the sake of illustration. Holiness is, just that love which is the fulfilling of the law; and that being is perfectly holy who loves God to the full extent of his rational faculties, whether weak or strong. The love of an angel, whose faculties are far superior to those of a man, must far exceed in positive strength the love even of the man who is perfectly holy, because the mental strength of the latter is greatly inferior to that of the former. Now, when, as in this parable the man of superior endowments, and filling a situation suited to them, is equally faithful with the man of inferior talents, his positive moral excellence as far exceeds that of the other as does his intellectual strength. He, of course, is capacitated for still higher attainments; so that it is meet that to him should be granted the additional talent of the unfaithful servant. It deserves consideration, too, that, as persons of different intellectual vigour will have different degrees of positive affection for the same interesting object, so, where they are favoured with the very same blessings, the one will feel a greater interest and enjoyment in them than the other. They both have the privilege of the same care and protection; but each values the blessing in proportion as he comprehends its worth. A child may be the heir of a rich inheritance as well as a man, but his views of its worth, and consequently his happiness, cannot equal those of the latter; and, in like manner, the sons of God must be happy in their privileges only in proportion to the extent of their comprehension of their excellence and glory. All the redeemed in heaven are equally freed from sin and from pain; but as bliss is not merely salvation from evil, but the enjoyment of positive good, so he whose capacity of enjoyment is greatest, in consequence of superior talents perfectly *sanctified*, must, in access to and union with an infinite good, have the greatest blessedness.

It is evident from this, that though it is not intellectual but moral perfection which is exhibited in Scrip-



ture as our final blessedness, and though the qualities of the heart form the highest distinction among intelligent beings, yet there must be a proportionate degree of understanding. It is only when separated from, and compared with, moral and spiritual excellence, that the Scriptures condemn it.

“The disciple whom Jesus loved,” was distinguished not only by a tender and an affectionate spirit, but as a “son of thunder,” and we accordingly find that along with Peter and James, he was a principal speaker and labourer in the defence and propagation of the Gospel. The book of the Revelation shows the man as well as the spirit which inspired him.

The man who is inferior in intellect, but superior to his neighbour in holiness, is doubtless the character to be preferred: The former is but a means—the latter is the end, and with the degree of it blessedness is connected. It is difficult, I may add, to have great powers without trusting in them: Every outward advantage has unhappily a tendency to nourish pride, and requires a proportionate degree of grace to counterbalance it: Hence it is only when exercised on sacred things that such powers are the means of augmenting the bliss of the possessor. It is also true that many of the wise and intelligent of this world are blind to the Gospel, while numbers who, in comparison, are but babes, understand and receive it. But still, since piety cannot even exist without a degree of intellect, and as, even in a perfect character, the measure of the former cannot exceed that of the latter, it must be evident that, where the two keep full pace with each other, there positive holiness and blessedness must be highest.

Accordingly, though the Saviour never made a show of his intellectual grandeur, but, on the contrary, always gave the preference to moral and spiritual greatness, he at the same time frequently blamed his disciples for not exercising their powers of understanding. Matt. xv. 16. xvi. 9—11: Mark vii. 18.



All, however, will be happy in perfection, because happy in proportion to their capacity for bliss: All vessels will be full; but, being of different dimensions, all cannot contain the same quantity. Holiness, it ought to be remembered, is not merely a negative, but a positive quality—I mean, it does not consist merely in the *absence* of sin. This is, properly speaking, purity, not holiness. All the redeemed will be equally pure in the sense of being equally delivered from sin; but holiness, in addition to this, is a *positive* spiritual likeness to God. The degree of this depends, among other things, on the natural talents of the individual, and on the degree in which they have been exercised in spiritual pursuits. When the principles of piety have been cherished and exercised, they strike their roots the deeper. A work in morals is not an act without a motive—it is a principle carried into exercise. Now, it is a law in nature, that the more a principle is exercised, it becomes the stronger: If so, since holiness and happiness are inseparably connected, the more we are like to God in *character*, the more must we be like to him in *bliss*; the more holy we are, the higher must be our place in the heavenly temple.

There is doubtless a difference in the degrees of conformity to our Lord *here*; and the Scriptures never give the most distant hint that heaven will annihilate all the dissimilarities which subsist among Christians in the present world, but clearly teach the reverse. There will be one on the right and another on the left hand of our Lord in his kingdom; and these places will be given in consequence of the character formed on earth. Though it will not hold in every respect, there is a sense in which the higher enjoyments of the heavenly temple will be ultimately the attainment of the least in the kingdom. Not that they will come to equal those who are now the greatest in the kingdom, but that, as the latter will continue to ascend higher and higher, so will the former, and that, of course, the places now filled by the one class will come in certain respects to be filled



by the other. Along this interminable line of divine excellence, the redeemed in heaven will all have room to proceed. The most exalted there are still advancing towards glory, such as creatures can attain ; but which is nevertheless at an infinite distance from that hallowed fountain of divine perfection, from whence all life and blessedness continue to proceed. The more elevated pleasures will thus in a measure be successively laid open to every individual as he becomes capable of enjoying them, in the general progress towards that glory which no created being can ever fully attain. Of the increase of the government of Christ as king of the church and of the peace and the happiness of his subjects, there shall be no end, Isaiah ix. 7, because his everlasting administration will furnish fresh and progressive displays of the infinite glory and perfection of Jehovah, and afford fresh and growing causes of blessedness to his people. The redeemed will for ever and ever continue to advance, and advance nearer and nearer to the sun of the divine glory, will become more and more beautiful by its lustre, and will more and more fully at once reflect and enjoy the splendour of the divine excellence and grandeur. What can equal the elevating thought that before us, in the enjoyment of the infinite Jehovah, there is the prospect of perpetually progressive bliss ? May not the least in the kingdom of God rejoice that he shall yet reach higher glory than that of him who is now the greatest ?

Keeping these remarks in view, allow me to refer you to some passages of Scripture which bear upon the subject. In the history of the Evangelists, our Lord promises a peculiar dignity to the apostles. Luke xxii. 28—30. Matth. xix. 28. They are told that in his kingdom they should sit upon twelve thrones, for the purpose of ruling the twelve tribes of Israel, or the church of God. He refers to their apostolic character, in which to this hour they continue to give law by their writings to the disciples of Christ. It is of importance to observe; that this honour is connected with his appro-



bation of their faithful and constant adherence to him amidst all his temptations. He felt attached to those who had manifested such attachment to him in the season of trial. "Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations," said he, with deep interest; and then promised them the nearest friendship with himself, and the honour of ruling in his kingdom. This part of Scripture establishes the principle which regulates the bestowment of glory in the church of Christ. Nor ought we to confine the honour referred to, to the present scene: we are taught in Scripture, that the wall of the heavenly city has twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. There is a connection, therefore, between the honour of the apostles and the future state of the church; though the great thing exhibited in this last passage is certainly the connection between the church, and the eternal truths of the Gospel, as preached by the apostles. When we think of their many failures while they were companions of our Lord in his trials—of his high claims on their obedience and attachment, and remember too that he was the author of their strength to suffer, and their will to serve, as well as of the truths they taught, we must be satisfied that the whole is a matter of unmerited favour.

We are taught by our Lord, that he who, having nothing more to give, cheerfully gives but a cup of cold water to a disciple of his when in want, shall not go without some reward: that he who is kind to "a righteous man," or a man distinguished for public labours in the cause of piety, and so the more exposed to persecution, shall, for the greater risk run in entertaining such a character than in being attentive to the obscure individual called "one of his little ones," receive a reward suited to the degree of principle thus called forth and exercised: and that he who received "a prophet," or an inspired ambassador of Christ, who would naturally be the very butt of persecution, should, in consequence, receive a reward proportioned to the danger incurred by



sheltering and honouring a character so obnoxious to the world. Matthew x. 40, 42. I need not say that this is far from implying any indifference towards the first of these as compared with the second, or towards the latter as compared with the third. The principle proceeded on, is, as I have said, the greater proof given of regard to the Saviour, in the greater risk that is run in the one case than in the other.

When Paul is exhorting Gentile Christians to assist their Jewish brethren, he enforces the duty of liberality, by declaring that he who in this service sowed sparingly should reap also sparingly. 2 Cor. ix. 6. The general principle of which I am now speaking is thus established; and though it is here applied to the blessings of this life, it does not appear that it is so exclusively. It seems to include spiritual blessings, and these in the future as well as in the present world. The same duty in substance is enforced in the epistle to the Galatians, by a similar argument; and the application of it to futurity there, is beyond a doubt. Gal. vi. 6—9.

The same principle explains all those passages in which Christians are exhorted to “lay up treasures in heaven,”—Matth. vi. 19, 20; to “lay in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come—1 Tim. vi. 19; to have respect to the blessed recompense of reward—1 Cor. xv. 58; and to elevate their hearts under all the reproaches and persecutions which may befall them for the sake of the Redeemer, by looking for the reward prepared for them in heaven. Luke vi. 22, 23. It ought not to be thought that this bears hard on some, nor ought any thing like envy to be felt. Such a state of mind is inconsistent with a proper conviction that the blessings of heaven are all the result of the most unmerited grace. Among the redeemed in heaven there can be nothing of this kind; indeed there will be no room for it; for all will be perfectly happy, inasmuch as each will have what is exactly suited to him, and to the full extent of what he can receive.

God, we are told, is not unrighteous, or unfaithful to



his promise, to forget our work and labour of love shown towards his name. Heb. vi. 10. Hence he will refer, at the day of judgment, to the deeds of kindness and benevolence done to his poor and distressed people, as delightful proofs of love to the Redeemer himself, and as genuine fruits of faith in the Gospel. Matth. xxv. 34—40. Nothing, however, of the nature of meritorious retribution is set before us in such representations of judgment. Eternal life is the gift of God, through Christ. But having obtained admission into the family of God, we are also made meet for its exercises and enjoyments by a change of mind ; which change is progressive while we are here, and keeps pace with our advancement in obedience. Thus, at the last day, God will manifest at once the exceeding riches and freeness of his grace, and his love of righteousness and holiness. 2 Tim. i. 18, compared with chap. iv. 8. The saved will trace all to the favour of God ; while, on the other hand, all creatures shall see and acknowledge the fitness of his procedure in judging every one according to his works.\*

\* There is nothing in the Parable of the Labourers (Matt. xx. 1.) who received every man a penny, at all inconsistent with this view of future glory. It is not the design of this parable to represent directly the reward of the redeemed in the day of Christ. They who are said to have laboured from the morning, and who murmured against the householder, cannot be Christians ; for they are put last, and, though called, are not chosen, which clearly implies that they are not children of God. The disciples had been promised the honour of sitting on thrones in the kingdom of Christ ; and this promise was associated by them with the common notion of their countrymen, that the Jews had a peculiar title to the blessings of his reign. While they expected the chief places for themselves, they thought that all other honours would be enjoyed by their countrymen, to the exclusion of the Gentiles, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. To correct this error, our Lord stated the general principle, that the first as to advantages should be last as to attainments ; and then illustrates it by this parable, in which he taught them, that the Gentiles, who were called long after the Jews, should, as to acceptance with God and admission into his church, be placed on a level with the Israelites ; and that while the bulk of the latter should reject the Gospel, many of the former would receive it. This, he says, would call forth the murmurs of



Permit me, my friend, now to suggest some remarks on the consistency of this view with the doctrine of salvation by grace. It is of great moment to remark, that the works which are rewarded are themselves the fruits of divine favour. Paul says, that he laboured more than all the apostles; but he adds, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." 1 Cor. xv. 10. If, then, what is done be entirely owing to divine grace, the reward must be quite gratuitous. The free favour of God is strikingly seen in the different measures of endowments, time, opportunities and success that are bestowed on different individuals. One man is possessed of strong powers of mind—another is as a child: one is placed in a public and useful station—another moves in a private and narrow circle: one is honoured to turn many to righteousness—another is useful on a smaller scale. The man of splendid talents,

such as thought themselves righteous, and despised others, as we know it did. As the Gentiles should thus be accepted of God and received into his family without regard to previous distinctions, so the situations to which they should rise in his family should correspond with the degree of positive likeness to the Saviour, which they should acquire, without regard to their birth. It is, however, of the former, or of acceptance with God, that the parable *directly* treats; though the latter, or the rule of their elevation in the kingdom, is evidently implied. The instruction communicated respects the question of justification, though the rule as to this goes upon a principle which illustrates that of the future rewards of Christians. The door of acceptance with God through faith in Christ is equally open to all, however different their previous character may have been. All who enter receive the same blessing. But, in perfect consistency with this, we are elsewhere explicitly taught what is here left to be inferred—namely, that the particular place occupied by each in the kingdom of heaven shall be the result of the particular measure which each shall attain of positive conformity of character to the Redeemer, without regard to any other distinction. Of this likeness to himself Christ speaks in Matthew xix. 29, where conformity to him as a sufferer is introduced. This parable then, instead of militating against what I have stated, serves to confirm it. Compare Matthew xix. 30, with chap. xx. 16, chap. xxii. 14, and Luke xiii. 30. The whole accords with the general tenor of our Lord's parables, in which a certain degree of light only is thrown on their subjects, the full disclosure of their glory being reserved till the outpouring of his spirit.



however, is sometimes very unsuccessful, while the comparatively weak are much blessed in their labour. The man, too, who is employed in what are called great things, sometimes falls into a snare, while another, who does the small and common things of his sphere with a great spirit, rises in true excellence. Hence faithful menial servants, or rather bond slaves, are promised "the reward of the inheritance," Col. iii. 22—24. It ought also to be remembered, that it is the intention which our Lord chiefly regards; and that he will reward his devoted and faithful servants, according to what they would have done if they could. In the eternal world, then, the last as to talents and advantage will in many instances be the first. In some, again, talents of the first order are accompanied, as in the instance of the Apostle Paul, with proportionally great and ardent piety, and followed by extensive usefulness. In such instances of the union of greatness and goodness there is much that interests the heart, and glorifies God. I may here add, that one is called in early life, is preserved to old age, and favoured with many opportunities of serving God; while another is called on the brink of the grave, or snatched from the womb to it. The one is honoured to labour and suffer long in the cause of Christ—the other has no opportunity of doing either. All this we must trace to the mysterious government of heaven. The future glory of some will, of course, far surpass that of others; but this will afford no cause for boasting, for the whole will be traced to pure favour.

There must certainly be an intimate connection between our present and our future state, for otherwise there would be such chasms and abrupt transitions in the progressive course of the divine government, as are quite opposed to all that has appeared in any of the works of Heaven. Circumstances will, no doubt, be changed, new sources of enjoyment will be opened, and the relations connected with this imperfect world will give place to others of a nobler kind, but the essential elements of happiness shall remain for ever. If, then,



the essential principles and felicity of the redeemed must be the same in heaven as on earth, the difference consisting only in the degrees of their perfection ; it follows, that the exercise of Christian principles here is a preparation for the exercise of them in more perfect relations in the heavenly country. The dispensation of time, therefore, and that of eternity, are connected as correspondent and contiguous links in the great plan of the Almighty ; and the relations and things of the former are so regulated as to be preparatory to the latter.

It is evidently a mistake, then, to confine the grace of God to one point. Some speak as if it were confined to the deliverance of the guilty, and their admission into heaven. It is not so ; for it is also displayed in the different circumstances and attainments of the saved below, and in the different degrees of their glory above. If the whole of the blessings of the everlasting covenant be the fruit of undeserved favour, surely God may communicate them in such measures as he pleases. We have no reason to complain because we are not angels, nor have the lowest angels any reason to do so, because they are not on a level with the highest of the heavenly spirits. As little cause is there for objecting to a diversity among the redeemed. In fact the varieties which obtain among all the works of the Almighty, form a proof that all his gifts are the fruit of free bounty. This future reward, then, instead of obscuring the lustre of divine grace, must itself be resolved into that grace, and is a striking continuation and display of its richness and its glory.

The reward in question is given, I would here remind you, not for our sakes, but for the sake of Christ. As our persons are accepted for the sake of the beloved, so are our works. Jesus says, " He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father." John xiv. 21. He also says, " The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me." John xvi. 27. Such as give a cup of cold water to a disciple of his, because he belongs to



him, shall not lose their reward. Mark ix. 41. The reward, then, is not given as the retribution of merit to *us* but as a public testimony of the love of God, to his Son—of his approbation of his character, and his complacency in his sacrifice. Were a person to reward our friend because of that friend's love to *us*, he would by this means give a striking proof of his *own* affection for us. In proportion to the greatness of the reward, compared with the littleness of what our friend had done for us, would be the proof of affection and esteem afforded to us. "Ye are my friends," said the Saviour, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." John xv. 14. Every expression of friendship, were it but the gift of a cup of cold water to a disciple, because of his relation to Christ, shall be acknowledged by his Father. The reward of the righteous is intended, then, for the honour of the Saviour. What can we do for him that is worthy of notice? and yet the reward is unspeakably great. What an honour does God put upon his Son, when every expression of love to him, and the least service performed, is so liberally rewarded! This, instead of militating against grace, exhibits its glory: Here it is seen expanding and perpetuated.

Another thing illustrative of this subject is, that this reward is conferred to display the divine love to righteousness and truth. Jehovah is distinguished for his love of rectitude and integrity; and it is his aim to impress his creatures with this view of his character. Ps. xi. 7. The rewards granted his creatures are employed as means of illustrating his name to created intelligences. For example, had Adam continued obedient, he would have been rewarded according to the implied promise of his God. He could not, however, have pleaded any merit; for nothing more than duty had been done. The reward would have been only an expression of love to holiness. The holy angels have nothing to boast of; but in developing and ministering in the accomplishment of the plan of redemption they have been rewarded by increasing knowledge of God, and progressive bliss



in the enjoyment of him ; and their happiness will be yet more augmented. 1 Pet. i. 12. Luke ii. 13, 14. Rev. v. 11, 12. This manifests the divine love to righteousness. The same is true of the redeemed from among men. In the service of God there is a present reward arising from the very nature of the thing itself, and at the end this will be vastly increased ; but, instead of elating with pride, it will raise their views of the gracious and holy character of God, Matth. xxv. 37—39. •It will serve also to silence the wicked, and to justify the administration of Heaven. Luke xvi. 25.

This reward is bestowed in addition, if I may use the expression, to the redemption from wrath, and from sin, obtained through the atonement. Should a prince pardon and raise to honour and wealth an atrocious and worthless rebel, the pardoned criminal would be bound by every tie to become an obedient subject. Should he be so through life, it would not be said that he had repaid the kindness of his king ; but if the prince, in addition to his pardon, were to reward him munificently for every piece of service, surely the grace which originally forgave him, would be displayed more than ever. The Lord pardons sinners freely, without difference. Of pure grace, he takes them into his family and gives them eternal life ; and that this may never even *seem* to be repaid, he gives an exceeding great reward for every, even the smallest, piece of service done by them. A reward so circumstanced, in place of *obscuring* the grace of God, is one special means of illustrating its absolute freeness : It displays the unbounded goodness of Jehovah ; and must command the homage, the love, and the gratitude of his people, throughout eternity.

There is a difference between forgiveness and legal “ acceptance in the Beloved,” considered as a change of state, and that gracious reward which is connected with personal excellence of character. To hear the Judge say, “ Thy sins are forgiven thee,” is to listen to a highly consoling declaration, but to hear him say, “ Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy



of thy Lord," is to receive an inconceivable addition to our blessedness.

Every man, then, in the future state, will reap fruit, analogous in kind to the seed which he now sows. The state on which all will enter on leaving this world, will correspond with their fixed principles, their habitual dispositions, and their predominant character. Gal. vi. 7, 8. Future blessedness is not an arbitrary gift, but necessarily arises from the principles which animate the hearts of believers. Future misery likewise will be, not an arbitrary infliction, but the natural result of sin. The degree of it will be proportioned to the degree of transgression and of depravity. Matth. xi. 21—24. Prov. i. 31. We are taught in Scripture, that the sins of believers are blotted out, and yet that all shall be judged according to their works. Isaiah xlii. 25. Rev. xx. 13. In regard to this I would remind you, that men shall be judged according to the *kind* and the *measure* of their works. The former will be a test of character, and the latter will show the degree of the character disclosed. The sinful deeds of the condemned will prove, that, when on earth, they believed not in nor loved the Saviour; and they shall be treated accordingly. Matth. xxv. 41—45. On the other hand, the good deeds of the righteous will show that love to Christ, flowing from faith in him, was the governing principle of their conduct. Matth. xxv. 34—40. The measure of those works cannot, however, be ascertained without comparing with them their sins and deficiencies. The degree of approbation to be expressed by the Judge must be determined, that the consequent reward may be seen by all to be the natural result of the degree in which they resemble the Saviour. All their sins will be declared forgiven, and so they will "find mercy in that day;" but the measure of praise must keep pace with the measure of their obedience. The whole reward, indeed, has its origin in mercy, but it will also be expressive of righteousness and faithfulness. Jude 21; and 2 Tim. i. 18. compared with chap. iv. 8.



'The events of this passing scene derive an importance indescribable, from their connection with the formation of our character. There is not an action or a word, not even a thought, that has not an influence in moulding our principles, and these principles will fix our lot for eternity. In heaven, holiness and happiness will perfectly correspond. They will do so, because every evil, natural and moral, shall be removed, and the principles which were here planted in a strange soil and an unfriendly clime will there flourish in the garden of God, and under a more genial sky. This is the seed time, and as we now sow we shall then reap. When I speak of future happiness and misery as arising from character, I am far from excluding the direct interposition of Heaven. In regard to the righteous, the direct agency of God will be employed in giving them such a body, and in placing them in such circumstances as shall best afford scope for the exercise of their principles, and for the enjoyment of their blessed result. In regard to the ungodly, his hand will be employed in placing them in such circumstances as shall fully allow their evil propensities to produce their natural and unhappy fruits. This shows the consistency between ascribing our future situation to character on the one hand, and to the direct agency of our Judge on the other. Sin and misery are not in all respects the same thing, but they are inseparably connected; and so it is with holiness and happiness: and the hand of God is seen in arranging every thing, so as to mark their inseparable connection. The judicial and natural effects of character are thus united. John v. 28, 29. Matth. xxv. 46. •

While we, then, build our hope of pardon and acceptance on the finished work of Christ—no more depending for these blessings on our duties than on our transgressions—let us bless God for what he hath wrought in us, and seek much of that spirit which animated the apostle when he said "I count not my life dear unto me, if I may but finish my course with joy." Acts xx.



24. Delightful indeed was his state of mind, when, not with pharisaical self-complacency, but with humble gratitude, he exclaimed, "I have fought a good fight—I have finished my course—I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love what shall accompany and follow his appearing." 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. Thus did he exult in the thought that he had been enabled in any measure to live to the honour of his much loved Lord.

Fired with the same spirit, let us ever be diligent. We ought to be ambitious of having the happiness of casting many crowns at the feet of the Redeemer. Never let us indulge the unworthy and ungenerous thought, that if we but get to heaven, nothing more need be minded. I here refer, not to that humility of mind which leads us, under a deep sense of guilt and demerit, to feel ourselves utterly unworthy of the very least of the divine mercies, and to say from the heart that the very lowest place in heaven were an astonishing gift of mercy, for surely we ought ever to feel thus; but I refer to that disposition which, being satisfied with deliverance from misery, and with a vague hope of happiness in heaven, cares not for the glory of God, and is indifferent to the good of others. When the prodigal intended only to ask the place of a servant, he manifested the humility of his spirit and likewise love to his father, for he felt that to be under his roof and under his eye, would be genuine happiness: But when his father treated him not as a servant but as a son, would this fill him with pride? Far from it. Humble as he was before, this would make him much more so. The exuberant kindness of his much injured parent would quite overwhelm him. Luke xv. 18—24. And when the sinner who feels that the lowest place in the house of God is a blessing inconceivably great, is elevated to an exalted station in the heavenly temple, will he not, instead of be-



ing thereby filled with pride, be the more penetrated with a sense of his own unworthiness, and of the infinite goodness of Jehovah?

Even should a slothful professor of religion get there, he must enter as a solitary individual—he could have no fruits of his labour—his conduct could not be applauded, nor could he participate in the joy of having served his Redeemer on earth. Let it not be said, that it is selfish and mercenary to labour and suffer in the hope of this reward. Is it selfish to covet the approbation of God? Were it not the greatest selfishness to be indifferent to it? Is it selfish to seek the approving testimony of conscience? Is it selfish to exult in the happiness of others? Is it selfish to rejoice in enlarged and transforming views of the worth and elevation of Christ, and in being honoured to manifest the riches of the divine character and glory? Surely it is not. Moses had respect to the recompense of reward, Heb. xi. 26.; Jesus himself was animated by the joy which was set before him. Let us, Heb. xii. 2, “be stedfast and immovable, always *abounding* in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. xv. 58.

I remain, &c.

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## LETTER XIV.

### ON SOME DIFFICULTIES RELATIVE TO COMING TO CHRIST.

Difficulty respecting convictions of sin—Relative to repentance—The nature of coming to Christ—The state of mind connected with coming to the Saviour—Mistake relative to the work of the Spirit—The nature of genuine humility—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

PERMIT me to refer to what I have already written to you, respecting the simplicity and suitableness of the



Gospel of Christ ; and in connection with it, to make a few more observations on the difficulties which you mentioned to me when I last had the pleasure of seeing you. Through the divine blessing, this may be the means of invigorating your faith and adding to your joy.

I begin by directing your attention to the difficulty you mentioned, respecting conviction of guilt. Some are much disquieted, from a fear that they are not sufficiently convinced of sin to warrant them to go to the Saviour, in the confidence of obtaining mercy. This proceeds upon the principle, that a certain degree of conviction, and a particular measure of alarm, are necessary as a sort of qualification for pardon. This, however, is by no means the case. There is a wide difference between what a sinner is called and warranted to do, and what, in point of fact, he will do. Every sinner is invited to come to Christ, and has a warrant on the ground of the divine promise to expect mercy on his going to him. Convictions of guilt and of danger form no part of the warrant to go, they only excite him to do so. A sense of sin leads to seek pardon ; and a sense of danger leads to seek safety ; and where the need of these blessings is not felt, the sinner feels no excitement to apply for them ; but neither the one nor the other is, in the least, a qualification entitling to them.

I am far from meaning that convictions of guilt are in themselves self-righteous. The subject of them may err as to the way of obtaining relief ; but the convictions themselves are founded on truth, and are what *ought* to be felt. Not a few having been convinced of guilt, and filled with a fear of the divine displeasure, have despaired of relief from any thing in themselves, but have been kept from giving way to utter despair by something they have heard of the Gospel ; and from some glimmering of hope, have been led to seek for relief, to search the Scriptures, and to inquire after the truth. These exercises are not in themselves sinful,



though at the time the glory of the Gospel is not discerned, for the truth has never been properly before them, and they cannot be said to be opposing it. So far from this, it were sinful not to cherish such convictions—it were to stifle the voice of conscience, and so to rebel against the light. The cry of mere distress, as uttered by the Jews on the day of Pentecost, Acts ii. 37, and by the Philippian jailor, Acts xvi. 30, is quite different from the supplications of arrogance and proud self-sufficiency. The former excites pure pity, the latter calls forth the divine indignation. There is an obvious distinction between the natural and necessary desire of happiness and deliverance from pain, and the criminal wishes and self-righteous pursuits which flow from voluntary and sinful principles. The former is essential to every rational, yea every animal being, and forms no part of the depravity of our nature. Its moral character is entirely derived from the direction of its exercise. It may take a wrong direction, and often is connected with what is sinful, yet in itself it is but an instinctive feeling: and it is of importance to remember this in dealing with awakened inquirers. •

I mean not by this, that such characters are free from the principle of self-righteousness, for this is natural to every man; but that this principle does not consist in convictions of sin, and a desire of relief. But when such begin to think that their conviction of guilt, and their consequent fears, are in some sense meritorious; or at least that they form a qualification for obtaining the benefit of the work of Christ, they become self-righteous in all their prayers, and tears, and services. Convinced of sin it becomes them to be; and hardened, indeed, are they who are not afraid because of it—but can this be a ground of confidence? It is passing strange, that men should deem it meritorious to be sensible that they are sinners, and should build a degree of hope on the circumstance of being convinced of rebellion against God. When a person imagines that before he can come to Christ for salvation he must



have as a *qualification*, a certain measure of convictions of sin, he has doubtless begun to make a righteousness of that very thing which ought to humble him in the dust.

You will perceive that there is a wide difference between that necessary principle which impels a creature to seek its own enjoyment, and the principle of love to God, which unites it to the Creator as the source of its happiness. The former is a universal natural instinct : the latter, not being a necessary principle, is in its exercise voluntary. There is a wide difference likewise between the principle of enmity against God, and the natural aversion from pain which is common to all creatures. These distinctions explain the difference between the supplications which the Scriptures condemn, and the mere cries of a wretched creature for mercy. The former must be positively sinful, but the latter are in themselves neither good nor evil. Such calls for relief cannot be objects of complacency, but they may be objects of pure benevolence. These two things are quite distinct.

Some, it is true, before they have believed in Christ, have been the subjects of deep conviction of guilt, and of the most overwhelming fears ; but these did not qualify them for obtaining pardon. Peter would have more hope of a good issue when his hearers were roused and alarmed, than had they remained insensible, because their excitement might lead them to seek deliverance in the Gospel ; but he could not encourage them to hope for mercy except in believing in Christ. When the Gospel came to be seen by them, its suitableness to their wretched circumstances at once struck them, and, from a sense of guilt and of want, they were led to flee to the Saviour for pardon and peace, but till they did so, they were not, in respect of positive holy dispositions, the least nearer the kingdom of heaven than before. It was not of the spirit of the scribe who answered our Lord discreetly, but of his confession that the love of God was of more value than multiplied sacri-



fices, that our Lord spoke, when he said that he was not far from the kingdom of God. Mark xii. 28—34. He meant that if this sentiment were followed out by him, (as it ought conscientiously to have been,) it would lead him to embrace the Gospel. Others, again, have been first convinced of sin; by hearing and reading of the death of Christ as an atonement for it. They came to see their disease in perceiving the nature of the remedy provided for it by the great Physician. In fact, the Gospel itself declares the guilt and danger of men, so that the belief of it involves a conviction of our lost and miserable condition. As the death of Christ was designed to honour the law, this conviction of guilt may be said to have been effected by it—not indeed as nakedly stated, but as magnified by the atonement. Isaiah xlii. 21. In the order of nature, a conviction of sin must precede an application to the Saviour; but in some cases the one precedes the other but for a short time; and in others the latter so very speedily follows the former, that they appear to the mind as one complex exercise. They are the more likely to be viewed in this light, because the mind at such a time is otherwise employed than in attending to its own operations. In the case of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, we see deep convictions of guilt in having murdered the Prince of life, and we see deep anguish arising from the dread of wrath; but when the Gospel was unfolded to them, they found instant peace and joy in believing. We see a similar scene in the case of the jailor at Philippi, who, in the course of a short time, passed from a state of insensibility to a state of alarm; and from that to a state of enlightened confidence. Acts xvi. 26—34. God does indeed often employ the dread, and in some cases the horror, which arises from a conviction of guilt, to arouse the sinner from security, and finally to lead him to the Saviour: But the length of time, during which this state of mind lasts, varies in different individuals, and so does the degree of distress; and whether the time be long or



short, or the distress great or small, there is nothing in either that qualifies for mercy.

It is with this as with disappointments in worldly pursuits. By such disappointments many are driven to overwhelming despondency; and others again are led by them, through the divine blessing, to inquire for a better portion. But because many are led by worldly bereavements and crosses to seek for peace in the Saviour, it surely does not follow that such calamities are qualifications necessary to warrant a sinner to go to him, or that every one must be afflicted before he can come to him. So far from this, though many are led by afflictions to the Saviour, there are others who, in the enjoyment of prosperity, have been drawn to him, and have found mercy through him. An instance of this kind we have in the case of Zaccheus, Luke xix. 2—10, and another in that of the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts viii. 27.

These remarks apply to deep and prolonged distress of mind, arising from convictions of guilt. Because this has been experienced by many, it does not follow that it is a process which must be gone through by *all*. The truth is, had such believed in Christ sooner than they did, or even at the very commencement of their trouble of mind, they had been as welcome to the blessings of salvation then, as when they actually embraced the Gospel. They had the same invitation then as when they *did* go to Christ; it was their *sin* that they did not go sooner, yea at the very first. The reason why they did not, was an aversion to the humbling and holy truths of the Gospel, united with a self-righteous principle. This they are brought to see when they believe in Christ. They are convinced of sin because they did not sooner believe in him, and they find that the use they made of their distress contributed to blind them. John xvi. 8, 9.

That there is no necessary connection between distress of mind and being brought to believe in Christ, is evident from the fact, that not all who trembled under



the discourse of Peter on the day of Pentecost, but only a part of them, "gladly received the word." Acts ii. 41. It is true, that without a sense of what renders the salvation of the Gospel necessary, it cannot be believed; but, though by means of the distress and alarm I refer to, God often leads to a welcome reception of the truth, they do not in themselves contain any *holy* advances towards it on the part of the sinner. They respect the state of the intellect and the conscience; not that of the heart. Convictions of sin arising from the law, frequently lead either to despondency on the one hand, or to a delusive hope on the other. The slavish terrors resulting from the former, and the groundless confidence excited by the latter, are of course no infallible signs or prognostics of conversion. Such convictions may issue in it, but often they do not: Witness the cases of Felix, Judas, and Saul. Acts xxiv. 25. Matt. xxvii. 3, 4. 1 Sam. xxviii. 15. Of themselves, they cannot reconcile the heart to God and his word; but, on the contrary, they sometimes call forth the most unhallowed ideas of both. It is with these as with the afflictions of life, which, although blessed to many, others have felt most keenly, and yet have afterwards forgotten them, and gone into every vanity. Ps. lxxviii. 31—37. When such sensations are experienced, the hand of God may be ordering them in subserviency to the designs of his mercy, which are afterwards to be manifested; but, I need not say that the subject of these fears has not been subdued, while the Gospel is not received by him, as far as he is made acquainted with it. Why, then, act as if a particular preparatory course of tormenting dread must necessarily precede faith in Christ?

There are some, however, who have had partial views of their guilt sufficient to cause pain, but accompanied with a half persuasion that they were Christians, who have been awakened to a sense of their true character, by occurrences which proved to their full conviction that they were yet strangers to the truth. Their per-



plexity arose from an attempt to reconcile the evils which they saw in themselves, with the existence of true religion, and not really from deep convictions of guilt. Had these partial convictions been followed up by them as they ought to have been, they had not remained so long in suspense. Their suspense terminated when, on honestly looking back on their course of life, they saw that there was nothing even in their religious services, as well as their other practices, but one scene of unbelief and wickedness. They found themselves shut out from all hope in themselves, but at the same time they were made to see the infinite glory of the atonement, and so were in mercy led to the Saviour for refuge. Their encouragement to go to him did not, however, arise from their deep consciousness of guilt, but from the perfection of his work, and from the grace of the Gospel.

Every man, I may here add, knows in some measure, that he is a sinner—he feels that this is a world of suffering; and he more or less feels an apprehension of something future, and ought to obey the light he has received.\* He is, of course, so far in a state of readiness for hearing and at once believing the Gospel; connected, as the statement of it ought ever to be, with a statement of the equity and the goodness of the divine law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the liability of the sinner to the divine curse, and his utter insufficiency to deliver himself. I may remark, too, that some, like Timothy, have known the Scriptures from their childhood, and have been early and gradually brought to see their disease and the remedy. 1 Tim. iii. 15, with chap. i. 5. Such, of course, may not have had the same deep convictions of guilt as some others, and the transition from their natural condition to a state of acceptance with God may not have been so striking.

The general principle that the operations of divine grace are not limited to one plan, is established by this fact in the history of Timothy, and may therefore be applied to other classes of characters. Accordingly there



are cases not unlike this even among persons more advanced in life. With such the work is very gradual, so that the same marked changes do not appear in them as in others.

Awful sensations, however, do not always flow from real convictions of personal guilt, as is evident from their effects. It ought not to be forgotten, that some take a pleasure in alarming addresses, not from regard to the truth, but partly because they like to be excited, and partly because their righteousness consists in the strength of their sensations. The principle at the bottom of the former reason is similar to that which leads many to witness an awful scene from the pleasure they feel in any strong excitement, and is very different from that alarm which arises from a real conviction of guilt, by the word of the living God ; and the principle at the bottom of the latter, is that which leads a man to trust in himself that he is righteous and to despise others. Accordingly the fact is, that the alarming address is often applied to others, rather than to the person himself, who is trusting to the excitement he is under, and has no small self-complacency in contrasting it with the calmness of those to whom he applies what is said.

In reference to this subject, as well as with regard to affliction, allow me to refer you to the cases of Zaccheus and of the Ethiopian eunuch, and also to those of the deputy, Sergius Paulus, Acts xiii. 7—12 ; of Lydia, Acts xvi. 16 ; and of the Jews whom Paul met at Rome. Acts xxviii. 23, 24. In these there is not the same process seen as in the case of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and that of the Philippian jailor. Indeed,

is vain to reduce all to one method. All are brought to see their lost and guilty condition ; that there is full salvation to be had through the one perfect work of Christ ; and that in no other way can this blessing be obtained. The whole are led, though not all exactly in the same manner, to rest their eternal all on the grace of God, as it flows to sinners through the atonement of his Son, and to live by faith in him. Let this always



be kept in view, and let not Jehovah be limited to one mode of producing a change in the heart.

It appears, then, that though a sense of sin is necessary to lead a sinner to apply to the Saviour for relief, and though a very great degree of it has sometimes been employed in order to excite to go to him, yet it is not a qualification warranting to do so; that no particular measure of conviction and alarm is a pre-requisite; that it is enough as to the act itself, if the sinner be led to go to the Redeemer, whether the measure of conviction be great or comparatively small, or whether it be just a feeling of wretchedness and unhappiness, which, though easily conceived, it may not be easy to express; and that in believing the Gospel itself, there is included a conviction that we are lost and guilty sinners.

Connected with this, is the difficulty you feel relative to repentance. The mistake arises from the principle which has led numbers to withhold the invitations of the Gospel till the sinner is, as they think, sufficiently alarmed and humbled because of sin, and then to introduce them as something to which he is entitled. Thus to limit the *proposal* of the blessings of mercy is to act very differently from the inspired messengers of Heaven. It may have the appearance of wisdom, but it defeats its own end, by turning the mind from the atonement, and from the grace of the Gospel, to something in itself. It is true, that though no man is justified on account of his humility and contrition, it is only such as are humble and contrite in heart that can, in the very nature of things, relish or enjoy the blessings of Redemption; but still the invitations of mercy are addressed to all indiscriminately. The promises of the consolations of God are made to sinners considered as bowing to his will; but it is by means of the goodness exhibited in the unlimited invitations of the Gospel, by the rich provision that is made for the salvation and bliss of believers, and by the wonderful medium through which the divine grace flows to the guilty, that the re-



•bellious heart is subdued. Now, as it is in believing the Gospel that true penitence is exercised, it cannot be a pre-requisite to our being called to believe it and to come to the Saviour. For a sinner to think that he ought not to embrace the Gospel till he be more deeply humbled and penitent, is but a specious deceit of an evil heart.

Repentance is not a condition of obtaining salvation—it is a branch of salvation itself. Considered in a general view, it is that entire change of mind which takes place when a sinner is converted to God. Acts v. 31, and xi. 18. This change, when spoken of in relation to the divine testimony, is termed “repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;” 2 Tim. ii. 25. when spoken of in relation to the Almighty, it is called repentance towards God; Acts xx. 21. and when viewed in relation to sin, it is called “repentance from dead works.” Heb. vi. 1. If, then, it be a change of mind to the acknowledging of the truth, it of course must include faith in it. This is that part of the change which respects the Gospel; and it must be connected with that branch of it which respects the views and the affections of the heart “towards God.” In so far as this change relates to sin, it includes a change of sentiment regarding it—a change of feeling towards it—and a change from hardness or impenitence of heart to sorrow because of it. Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. Ezek. xxxvi. 31. I need not tell you that this is very different from the notion that repentance is just a feeling of regret, or remorse, for sin; and even from that which confines it to heartfelt sorrow for it. It includes, indeed, sorrow for every transgression, but only as a part of the change which takes place on receiving the truth. The whole included in this repentance was preached by John, the harbinger of our Lord, by “saying unto the people that they should believe on him who should come after him—that is, on Christ Jesus.” Acts xix. 4. Surely, then, it cannot be a pre-requisite warranting an application to the Saviour; and what is true of it as a whole, ap-



plies in particular to that sorrow which is an essential part of it.

It is only by looking on Calvary, and on the beauty of holiness as exemplified by him whom our sins pierced, that our sense of guilt and of demerit is deepened, and that we are made to mourn for sin with genuine and heartfelt contrition. Instead, then of refusing comfort because our previous convictions and our sorrow for sin were but slight, let the mind now dwell on the cross of Christ. It is this display of the unbounded goodness of God towards us, notwithstanding our guilt and impenitence, that softens the hard heart, and melts the soul into tenderness. Ezekiel xvi. 62, 63. Jeremiah xxxi. 19. Zechariah xii. 10. There we see that law honoured which we have so often violated ; and the exceeding sinfulness of sin is read in the overwhelming woes of the Redeemer. The mind takes its station here, and contemplates the flowings of mercy in the blood of the Saviour. Looking with the deepest interest on the Lamb of God, we see the love of his heart in his manifold sufferings. Convictions of guilt flash upon the mind, when we take our stand at Calvary : there, love and grief, hope and joy, unite their streams, and become sweetly blended, Luke vii. 36—50. The heart is not distracted—its very weakness is met ; for that same object which impresses most deeply a sense of the danger consequent on sin, gives the most reviving views of the divine mercy and love.

I beg you to notice, that there is nothing in these statements which can sanction the practice of addressing those as Christians who do not give evidence of a change of mind. Some do so as soon as alarm is felt, and others when the word is received with joy, but both are in the wrong. Holiness of character is not necessarily connected with a strong or a sudden excitement : the question is—From what does it spring ? Care ought to be taken that while the Gospel is stated without reserve, the wounds of the sinner may not be healed slightly. It is an awful thing to buoy up with presumptuous hopes such



as are deceiving their own souls. It is in vain that they dwell upon the agony of distress which preceded their emotions of joy, for if they are not building their confidence on the basis of the work of Christ, they are yet far from God.

Let me now call your attention to the difficulty you mentioned relative to the nature of coming to Christ. In Scripture, believing in him, and coming to him, are expressions used interchangeably ; strictly speaking, the latter is the effect of the former, Heb. xi. 6 ; but so closely are they connected, that the one involves the other. Still, however, the distinction between them is explanatory of their nature. When a sinner is persuaded of the truth, that salvation is to be had through Christ, and that in no other way can he be delivered from absolute ruin, he comes to him for the precious blessing, or, in other words, he commits himself to him, or trusts the salvation of his soul in his hands. On hearing the invitation, "Come unto *me* and I will give you rest," instead of fixing on the word *come* and desiring to know how to perform this act aright, that he may find rest from the consideration of having done it well, he fixes his eye on the word *me*, and says, "Does Christ say come to *me* ? To him, then, will I go." Matth. xi. 28—30. In coming to the Saviour, then, he is not engaged in speculating on the act of coming as an exercise of the mind, but is occupied with the character of him to whom he comes, and with his gracious invitation to cast his all upon his perfect atonement. In His work and character he sees all his salvation and all his desire ; and in His unfettered invitation he finds abundant assurance of a free welcome. The result is, that this sense of the free and exuberant love of the Saviour excites him to trust his all in His hand ; and in doing so his soul finds rest.

Connected with this, is what you said respecting that fervour of affection and desire which accompanies an application to the Saviour. Perhaps, my dear friend, you are striving to gain the effect, without dwelling suffi-



ciently on the cause. I need not tell you, that faith in that Gospel which preaches peace to the very chief of sinners is the principle from which all holy affections proceed. It is so because of the glorious nature and assimilating influence of the truth believed. Let your mind, then, be carried beyond its own exercises, to the attractive object of its faith ; for in no other way can the effects you desire be produced. The emotions of the mind must be excited by some existing cause which we either perceive ourselves, or hear of by the credible testimony of others. Thus the joy of the shepherds arose from what they had heard and seen, and the joy of Jacob arose from the fact declared to him, and not from reflecting on the feelings of the heart. And the peace and the consolation of a Christian arise in the first instance from the object of faith, or, in other words, from what God has testified in his word.

Saving faith is the belief of the saving truth ; for the efficacy of faith arises from the thing believed. In believing it, we see nothing to encourage us before God, but his plain testimony concerning the all-sufficiency of the atonement to take away sin, and his promise of eternal life to all who believe in it. When convinced of the fulness, freeness, and suitableness of the salvation of Christ, the heart, with all its thoughts and affections, comes to be completely engaged with it. Being persuaded that he has done all that is necessary as the ground of salvation to sinners, we rest on his work ; and we feel attracted to the Gospel, because it contains all that is requisite to gladden and purify our spirits. The more that we feel the necessity of this salvation, and the more that we see of its interesting nature, the more must we cling to and exult in the Saviour. These workings of the affections, the desires and the feelings of the heart, naturally flow from the belief of the Gospel : and in vain do we look for them while the great spring of them is forgotten. To expect that these warm affections will spring up into lively exercise while faith is weak, is to forget their connection with it as the principle from



which they proceed, and to look for the fruit without the due culture of the tree. Such mistakes frequently arise from confounding faith with its effects,—a practice by which the beauty and simplicity of the Gospel are exceedingly marred.

When the Scriptures represent Christians as running to the Saviour, as leaning upon him, and laying hold of him, Heb. vi. 18, they exhibit in a most natural manner the effects of faith in him. The truth is involved in obscurity when we attempt to explain faith from such figures, instead of explaining, as is most rational, the figures from it. When exposed to the storm, for example, how eagerly does the traveller flee to an open shelter: In the time of extreme danger, with what pleasure do we run to a place of safety; and with what affection do the needy go to a generous benefactor upon his kind invitation. Such cases serve to illustrate the feelings and the workings of the heart on believing the Gospel, in which Christ is exhibited as “a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” Isaiah xxxii. 2. and lv. 5. It is easy to see how love and desire, hope and gratitude, delight and holy activity, will all spring from faith in the message of mercy. The heart, however, is at the time engaged in reflecting on the objects which occasion its feelings, rather than on the feelings themselves. But while the peace and the joy of a Christian spring, in the first instance, simply from what is testified in the gospel, yet the consideration that his character and feelings have undergone a change by the influence of divine grace, is fitted to increase and to confirm his joy, inasmuch as it shows the glory of that goodness which opened his mind to the truth, inclined his heart to embrace it, and is continuing by means of it to meeten him for the inheritance of the saints in light. Gratitude and esteem, love and holy activity, come thus to be the more cherished, and the assurance of hope, in consequence of the increase of faith, by exercise, comes to be proportionally strengthened.



These exercises, then, are not pre-requisites to our going to Christ, but are the effect of going to him on the warrant of the Gospel itself. When faith is weak, and the Gospel but dimly discerned, these holy fruits are proportionably small. There may indeed be a natural movement of the animal affections by the new objects about which they are exercised; but this warmth and false luxuriance are very different from the real growth of heavenly dispositions. The way to increase their genuine warmth and real vigour, ~~is to~~ is to look at all times to that from which they proceed, and to continue and abound in the active exercise of the principles produced by it. I speak not, you will perceive, of simply looking on the cross and character of Christ as if nothing more were necessary, but of acting in all cases with these in our eye. Confidence in him, and unremitting activity, ought ever to be united. The life of a Christian is not a life of mere contemplation, but of assiduous diligence:—His diligence, however, is stimulated by looking to “the Author and Finisher of our faith.” Heb. xii. 2. His faith is increased by its being thus exercised by active obedience, for it is a law in nature, that the exercise of a principle adds to its strength. It is easy, then, to see how the growth of this assurance of hope is connected with our giving all diligence to add to our faith all holy dispositions and services; for if, by this means, our faith is invigorated, it follows that as the assurance of hope is proportioned to that of our faith, so, whatever strengthens the latter, must also strengthen the former. The hope of eternal life is thus made to rest, not on our obedience, but on the object of our faith, because it keeps pace with the measure of our faith in that object.

I beg here to call your attention to a very common error among inquirers after the truth, and to which I think you referred. It is that of waiting till they shall find some change, or good disposition, wrought in them by divine influence, before they will come to Christ, or take comfort from the Gospel. In opposi-



tion to this, and every self-righteous course, the Scriptures teach, that the finished work of Christ, exclusive of every exercise of man, is that for the sake of which God justifies a sinner; and that the first scriptural consolation received by the believer arises from the Gospel, and not from reflecting on the feelings or change of his own mind towards it—though doubtless his comfort is increased and continued by the influence of the truth upon his character. Acts ii. 41, 46, 47. viii. 39. xvi. 34. Rom. v. 1. x. 6—11. Gal. ii. 16—21. Eph. ii. 4—9. iv. 32. According to what I have stated, this change, and all good dispositions, are obtained in coming to him. As it is only, however, by surrounding objects *appearing* to a man previously blind, that he knows the blindness of his eyes to be removed, so it is by the *result* that we come to know of divine influence. The Spirit of God inclines the heart to go to the Saviour, and to renounce all other grounds of confidence. But that which *inclines* a sinner to go to him, and that which *calls* him to go, and warrants him to hope for pardon on his going, are quite distinct. No consciousness of any internal or external qualification whatsoever is necessary to authorise any sinner to apply to the Saviour. The general and the indefinite calls of the Gospel, in which sinners are described merely by their *guilt* and their *necessities*, form the ground on which they are warranted to go to him in the confidence of obtaining mercy. Isaiah lv. 1—3. It is in leading the mind to these, and to the work of Christ, that the Spirit acts. John xv. 26. xvi. 14, 15. It must be a great mistake, then, to place the consciousness of his work between us and the free salvation of the cross. The effect of doing so has in some cases been, that even when every false confidence was abandoned, and no help was expected but from Christ, the mind has been long kept in perplexity from not seeing that any sinner may go to him for mercy.

The influence of the Spirit is not something of which we have a distinct and an immediate perception.



There are no new faculties given us ; those we have are only directed by him to their proper objects. Sanctification is not effected by immediate inspiration. No new revelation is made ; the mind is only taught by the Spirit to discern and to receive the truths already recorded in Scripture. 1 Pet. i. 22, 23. His agency is not perceived or felt separate from the influence of the word of God upon our minds and our affections : it is known only by its effects. The word and the Spirit are not, indeed, the same ; ~~they~~ <sup>they</sup> are in themselves quite distinct. The word, however, is the medium through which he works. John xvii. 17. The mode in which he operates is beyond our comprehension ; but whatever it may be, we can have no sense of his operations separately from the workings of our minds. His gracious influence mingles itself, as it were, with the reasonings, motives, and persuasions of his word. At the time that we are taught by him, it is the thing taught, and not the teacher, that engrosses the heart. On reflecting on the effects, however, we trace the whole to him, and give him the glory. When the mind is occupied with discussions about the *mode* of his operations, it is turned from the great objects exhibited by him, and so ceases to feel their power. If, on the other hand, we forget our own weakness, and do not constantly rely on the promised aid of the divine Spirit, we are cherishing a principle directly opposed to that meek and humble temper of heart in which God delights, and a principle which must blind us to the truth. Beautiful is the simplicity of Scripture, in which we are directed to the Gospel, as that by which he works ; and to the throne of grace for his necessary and gracious influences. John iii. 5, with verses 14, 15, 16, 17, 18. 2 Thess. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 22. Luke xi. 9—13. 2 Cor. ii. 14, 15. Activity and dependence are thus united ; and while we are sanctified, God is glorified.

No one, then, ought to be distressed, as if he had not been the subject of this influence, because he can-



not tell, from an immediate perception of it, how it is exerted ; nor should any one boast of divine impulses apart from the power of the truth. Neither should any delude themselves by waiting for some extraordinary impressions, before they will apply to the Saviour. Let the Gospel, then, be contemplated by you with an humble and devout heart, and in dependence on the promise of divine teaching ; and let its gracious calls be at once yielded to, in the faith of acceptance through Christ. The belief of it will produce acceptable principles and acts of obedience. These acts of obedience will tend to increase the knowledge of the truth, and this increasing knowledge will invigorate you for duty ; so that faith and obedience will be found to have a reciprocal influence, they will act and re-act the one upon the other.

Be not misled by a false humility, which feels as if it were improper to expect the blessings of the everlasting covenant in your present condition. The spirit of this spurious humility we see in Peter, who, when our Lord condescended to wash the feet of his disciples, said, " Lord, dost thou wash my feet ?" and again, " Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet." John xiii. 6—10. Peter in this showed a deep sense of the dignity and the greatness of his master, and of his own insignificance. He did not, however, dwell sufficiently on the purity and the holiness of Christ, and his own guilt and demerit as a sinner. Hence our Lord led his attention to that spiritual purification of which he stood in need. In doing so, the Saviour had his eye on what he should have to suffer, in order to the purification of the souls of men ; and when Peter at last came to see what was included in the language of his Lord, he would deeply feel for the erroneous views he had formed. If it were too much for our Lord to wash the feet of his disciples, what would it be to suffer what Gethsemane and Calvary witnessed ; to endure the desert of sin ; and to expire under the curse of the divine law ? True humility consists, not in deeming it an act



of presumption to expect, or receive, the blessings of heaven, and for that reason declining the acceptance of them ; but in feeling that, great and many as they are, they are all necessary ; and that wonderful as is the medium through which they flow to us, no other could have sufficed. The question with us ought not to be, are not the blessings of redemption too great for our deserts ? but, can we do with less ? The *least* of the divine mercies is beyond our deserts, but the *greatest* of them is not beyond our *necessities*. God hath already given his Son, and nothing is too great to be given through *him*. In feeling that such is our guilt, and such our wretchedness, that unless all the mercies of the new covenant are granted us, we must perish ; and in gratefully receiving what the abundant goodness of God hath provided, we manifest that true humility which the Scriptures extol.

The heart, on viewing the astonishing means by which redemption is provided, admires the riches of divine grace ; and, conscious that nothing less could have answered the end, feels itself shut up to this method of salvation, and is subdued by the overpowering influence of gratitude. Thus David, when the Lord made him many promises, which included the salvation of the Messiah, went into the sanctuary and humbly worshipped God, saying, that such was not “ the manner of man ; ”—that when he thought of himself and of his father’s house, he was lost in wonder at what had been promised. His humility was not of that spurious kind which would have led him to refuse the blessings in question, as too much for him to receive : on the contrary, it appeared in his praying, that it might be to him “ according to the word of his God,” and that the whole of the promised blessings might in due time be fully communicated. 2 Sam. vii. 18—29. Such is the humility which all ought to feel and to manifest.

Pray, as did the disciples, for an increase of your faith, Luke xvii. 5. Do it with an importunate heart ;



encouraged by the call and the promise of the Saviour, who feeds his flock like a kind and a faithful shepherd. He conducts them with the utmost tenderness and care; and with a wise and affectionate regard to their age, strength, and situation. He does not overdrive, or leave the least of them behind. Such of them as cannot keep pace with others, he waits upon with all patience and kindness, and leads them softly along. Those who cannot walk at all, he takes up in his arms; and, in a manner the most engaging, "carries them in his bosom." Isaiah xl. 11. Such are the beautiful images employed to represent the tenderness of his heart, and his affectionate concern for the very feeblest of his people.

Be not, I entreat you, discouraged or cast down because you meet with difficulties; but persevere. Wait upon the Saviour and implore his aid. In the most eminent Christians there is a conflict. They all feel much within that is evil: all of them are obliged to maintain constant vigilance; and not one of them expects complete rest in this world. This is far from lessening their sense of the evil of sin; but it keeps them from despondency. They know that the truths of Scripture are written "that they sin not," and this preserves them from presumption; but they know also that, if unhappily they do sin, there is an advocate with the Father; and this leads them with humble hope to the throne of grace, for mercy to pardon, and grace to help in time of need, 1 John ii. 1, 2. Heb. iv. 16. It is with them, as with a person who is afflicted with a disorder of which he does not expect to be ever perfectly cured, but which may be kept under by a particular regimen and medicine. If he neglect these means of keeping it in check, it instantly gains vigour. Or, if he do, or take any thing which will counteract their influence, the same effect will follow. His safety, of course, depends on his continuing without intermission in the use of the precautions and the medicine adapted to his malady. In like manner, the Christian does



not expect to be perfectly free from sin in the present life ; but, by continuing to apply the remedy provided in the Gospel, he, in a measure keeps sin under, and gradually subdues it. If, on the other hand, he let the truth slip out of his mind, or has recourse to other means of deliverance, then sin instantly gains strength. You will perceive from this, that our safety lies in living constantly by the faith of the Son of God. Let a life of faith, then, be your aim. With your heart turned to heaven for assistance, seek to be progressively sanctified, and “ look for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Jude 21.

I am, &c.

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## LETTER XV.

### ON CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER.

Confidence in prayer the privilege of Christians—Arises from the character of God as a Father—From the atonement—From the intercession of Christ—From the promises of a gracious answer—Includes freedom of speech at the throne of grace—Necessary because of discouragements—Blessings we are warranted to ask.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE repeatedly recommended to you the exercise of prayer, and shall now lead your attention to the duty, and the privilege, of coming to the throne of grace with filial confidence and freedom of speech.—Prayer is the very life of genuine religion. It serves to maintain on the mind a devout sense of our entire dependence on God, of his right to govern us, and of our deep responsibility as his creatures and his redeemed children. It is calculated to excite the most profound veneration, and the deepest self-abasement and contrition of heart ; while it endears to us the character of Christ, and increases our desire of conformity to his spirit. It relieves, sanctifies, and enriches the soul ; fits for the



thankful reception of the blessings of heaven ; and prepares us at once for the duties, the conflicts, and the varied circumstances of this life, and for holy fellowship with God in that which is to come.

The throne to which we are called, is denominated a " throne of grace." Heb. iv. 16. Had it been merely a throne of glory, and still more had it been a throne of judgment, we might well have been filled with alarming fear and with slavish dread. But as it is a throne of grace, we may approach it with composure and confidence. It were, indeed, at once dishonourable to God and injurious to ourselves, did we come to it with rude audacity, or coarse and trifling familiarity. That boldness which the Gospel warrants is opposed, not to holy veneration and godly fear, but to servile dread and distrustful despondency. Heb. iv. 16, compared with chap. xii. 28, 29. It is such confidence as is adapted to the case of a suppliant imploring mercy and unmerited favour, under a consciousness of guilt, and filled with contrition. It arises from nothing in ourselves, but from the gracious character and the wondrous love of God ; and consists in a confident persuasion that as we are allowed, yea invited and besought, to come to him, we may assuredly expect a cordial reception.

He whom we address is our Father. This is a most endearing relation, and fraught with abundant consolation. It serves to aid our conceptions of the divine goodness, but yet it cannot do justice to the subject. Conceive in your mind the bowels of compassion, which fill the breast of an affectionate friend and an indulgent parent, and then think of the perfection of all that is kind and amiable in the heart of the Father of mercies. He gives with the heart of a parent, not reluctantly, but with cordial pleasure, even with all the love, tenderness, and bounty, which this character supposes. Matt. vii. 7—11. Earthly parents may be unnatural ; a woman may forget her sucking child, but he will never forget his children. Isa. xlix. 14—16.



He tenderly pities them; and even when he afflicts them, it is with the yearning bowels of a Father, and with a view to their profit. Heb. xii. 9, 10. We should certainly approach him with filial confidence and sacred boldness, did our faith correspond with this view of his relation to us; in which he so far condescends to our weakness as to excite our trust in him, by an appeal to the feelings of a parent's heart. He knows all our circumstances and wants; he is ever with us; and is ever able to relieve us. He delights in showing mercy; and never does he upbraid with guilt, with favours formerly conferred, or with the frequency of our applications. He will, with the utmost readiness, forgive our sins; purify our hearts; keep us from evil; give us strength for duty; patience under suffering; in due time deliverance from trouble; and, finally, everlasting life. "Fear not, my dear flock," said the Saviour, "your Father is delighted in giving you the kingdom." Luke xii. 34. He gives it with all his heart; it gratifies his very soul to confer it; and will he not, then, cheerfully give all that is necessary on the way to it?

The confidence which this view of the divine character inspires, is exactly that which, as sinners, we need. Sin at one time was viewed as nothing; it was difficult to excite our fear, and to convince us of our need of mercy. We rushed headlong with presumptuous boldness. The stupor of insensibility was mistaken for the peace of God. When, however, we are brought to see it in its true light, we can hardly be persuaded that God will forgive it, and receive us into favour, and so are in danger of perishing with the fearful and unbelieving. To meet this state of mind, and to gain our confidence, he has revealed himself as merciful and gracious—as full of pity and compassion—and as abundant in goodness and truth. He adapts his dispensations to our necessities and our fears, and seeks to recover our alienated minds by the overflowings of his goodness. He has even given up his own Son unto suf-



fering and death, that he might "commend his love towards us," Rom. v. 6—8, in all our guilt and demerit. Much has been done, that the heirs of promise might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them. And why has he done all this? but because, till we are brought to trust in him, we cannot come to him with a proper spirit, and cannot be conformed to him. Ps. cxlvii. 11. Heb. xi. 6, 7. with Gen. iii. 8.

Admirably fitted are the discoveries of the divine goodness, and the gifts of divine love, to attract us to God, and to cherish the most assured hopes of all that is good in itself, and adapted to our condition. Animated by this, we may come to the throne of grace with holy and steady confidence. We are apt to view God as rather unwilling than otherwise, to communicate the blessings of his covenant; and to consider what is bestowed as drawn from him by the interposition of Christ: But the whole of the mediatorial work of the Saviour is the fruit, and not the cause of his love. The opposite view must destroy all confidence, and infuse a spirit of jealousy and suspicion. Scriptural apprehensions of his character lead us to him as one cheerfully disposed, yea delighted, to do us good.

I shall now call your attention to another ground of confidence in approaching unto God—namely, the boundless merit of the atonement and character of our great High Priest. Heb. ix. 11—14, 23—26. He is the way to the Father. Our state and character require that all intercourse between God and us should be through a mediator; and we are accordingly called to approach him in the name of Christ. John xiv. 6. To come to God in his name, is to draw near to the throne of grace as guilty sinners, disclaiming all confidence in ourselves, and pleading exclusively the worth of his character and sacrifice; and looking for all that we ask, as the reward of his work.

The Throne of Grace means the Mercy-Seat. The reference is to the covering of the Ark in the Mosaic



Sanctuary ; on which, and towards which, the blood of atonement was sprinkled. Exodus xxv. 21, 22. Lev. xvi. 2, 14, 15. Here God sat as propitiated : Here he could display his mercy and his grace, in consistency with the purity and the holiness of his character. Psal. lxxxix. 14. This was an expressive emblem of the Redeemer, by whose atonement the curse of the law has been removed, and whose sacrifice has become an honourable medium of the forgiveness of sin, and of communion with God. As the Jewish mercy-seat or propitiatory was the medium of mercy, and of fellowship with Heaven for the ancient worshippers, so Christ is the great medium through which we have access to God, and through which he communicates of his goodness to us. It was towards the mercy-seat that the Israelites directed their prayers. Josh. vii. 6. 1 Kings viii. 29, 30. Dan. vi. 10. This was not from a superstitious regard to the place, but because there God dwelt as the God of peace, and because their services could not be accepted, except through the Messiah, of whom the ark was an expressive figure. In New Testament language, it was looking to God through a Mediator. In drawing near to the throne of God, we ought to trust to the precious blood of Christ. However unworthy we are, the Saviour is worthy to receive all glory and blessing. Rev. v. 11, 12. In proportion to our knowledge of his work and character, and the steadiness of our reliance on his sacrifice, will be our enlargement, confidence, and happiness in devotion. From him our hope springs, and it is "in believing in him that we are filled with joy and with peace."

But consider not only the atonement of Christ, but likewise his intercession. Rom. viii. 34. Heb. vii. 25. He pleads for us : he presents our services ; and he obtains for our prayers, audience and acceptance. Even after a rebel has been pardoned by his prince, he will feel afraid to enter the presence of his sovereign ; and will be anxious that he, through whose mediation he obtained forgiveness, should take him by the hand and



present him to the king. So is it with us. We could not be admitted into the divine presence by ourselves, but the Mediator introduces us by kindly presenting us to God. Ephes. iii. 12. 1 John ii. 1, 2. This meets the fears of the returning sinner, and the discouragements of the timid and dejected Christian. The intercession of the Saviour is always prevalent, and it embraces all our concerns. Our prayers are very defective; we know but little of our wants and our dangers, —but the gracious Advocate within the veil is perfectly acquainted with the whole. When, like Peter, we see not the approaching evil and danger, he does; and he prays for us that our faith may not fail. Luke xxii. 31, 32. He asks that we may be blessed with all necessary blessings below, and at last with all the mercies of the everlasting covenant. Since, then, we have such a friend and a brother in the heavenly temple, we may approach the divine throne with confidence, resting assured that through him we shall receive the desire of our hearts. How fitted is this view of his character to encourage, revive, and satisfy the soul!

Let me also remind you of the many promises that the Lord will hear the prayers of his people. Psalm lxxv. 2.; cxlv. 18, 19. Prov. iii. 6. Isa. lxxv. 24. John xiv. 13, 14; xv. 23. These promises have been illustrated by a succession of examples, all admirably calculated to banish the fears which a sense of guilt and of demerit frequently suggests. The history of the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, is full of such examples. Nor are they confined to such eminent characters; for in every age the Lord has heard his people, however feeble they may have been, and whatever were the circumstances of their lot. John was told, that the incense offered up in heaven accompanies the prayers of *all* saints. Rev. viii. 3, 4. Through the intercession of Christ, signified by the incense, they are received and answered. When we engage in this duty, and continue in it in a proper spirit, we come to know, from our own experience, that the Lord never said to his



people, "Seek ye my face in vain." Isa. xlv. 19. This serves to increase our confidence, and to endear to us the privilege of prayer. With these things before us, we may well follow the apostolic exhortation,—to draw near with a true heart in the full assurance of faith, happy in deliverance from a sense of unpardoned guilt, and in the confidence of acceptance with God, through the purifying virtue of the blood of sprinkling. Through the Mediator, we have access even into the holiest of all, and there he himself ever liveth to make intercession ; so that we may at once, with confidence and humility, triumph over the fears of condemnation. Heb. x. 19—22.

But this boldness includes not only confidence of success in our petitions, but full freedom of speech in addressing God. This liberty of speech is expressive of intimate and endearing fellowship with him as a Father, and is one of the privileges of his family. We are not kept at an awful distance, as if we were strangers ; but, like children, we have free access to him at all times, and in all circumstances. In every thing we may make our requests known to him, for there is nothing he will think too insignificant to be laid before him. To him, then, we may completely unbosom ourselves, and freely and fully unfold what we could tell no earthly friend, however near and dear to us. Yes—to him we are exhorted to pour out our hearts, when so burdened with cares and anxieties, or with griefs and alarms, that we know not how to bear them, and are ready, with a bosom full of sorrow and perplexity, to sit down and mourn over our lot, Ps. lxii. 8 ; cxlii. 1—5. Lament. iii. 11—19. Phil. iv. 6, 7.

Distressing it must be to sit deploring our fate, and saying, "What shall I do !" But there is no reason whatever for thus giving way to sad lamentation and despondency. We are encouraged to go to the Lord with a heart full of grief, and tell him of our distresses—to keep nothing back, but to pour all our complaints into his merciful bosom—to make him our counsellor



and friend—and on him to cast our every burden and care, in the confidence that he careth for us, and will sustain and bless our souls. Psalm lv. 22. 1 Pet. v. 7. This relieves the mind. Having told him of all our cares, anxieties, and distresses, we feel calmed and encouraged : “ the peace which passeth all understanding ” guards the heart : we rest on God as one who knows all our state ; and feel satisfied that it is for us to keep the path of duty, and to leave all events with Him. How sweet thus to be unable to recline with humble confidence on the bosom of our Father, and calmly to fall asleep in the absence of all corroding care and disquieting anxiety ! Ps. iv. 8. When the mind is stayed on God, we feel serene and satisfied in the wildest storms, and the darkest dispensations. In the deepest afflictions he can soothe the mind and strengthen the heart. “ The waves may beat, and the tempest roar, but the anchor of hope fixed in the heavenly temple will be a complete preservative.”

The grounds of confidence to which I have referred you are particularly necessary, because of the many *discouragements* we meet with in the exercise of prayer. To a few of these I beg your attention. We are under the necessity of daily struggling with an evil heart of unbelief, and resisting temptations to depart from God : we are conscious of many errors, and feel how feeble are our efforts, and how small is our progress in the Christian course. Smoothly as we proceed in the absence of temptation, we have to lament that when our temper is crossed, or any thing opposes our natural bias, we instantly stumble. When thus conscious of guilt we feel ashamed ; our minds are shaken, we feel shy, and are in danger of fleeing from God, instead of going to him and fully confessing our sins and demerit. In the case of some heinous offence, we must in particular be filled with the deepest concern, and we will naturally feel afraid to approach the throne of our God. Deeply, without question, we ought to feel our guilt and our baseness ; and it becomes God to frown upon us in



such circumstances, by withdrawing the joys and the consolations of his love. Indeed, in the very nature of things, joy must be interrupted, and confidence marred, at a time such as this. No earthly resources can then calm the conscience or tranquillize the heart. "To be conscious of living in transgression of the will of God made Adam miserable even when in Paradise. What was Eden to him when he heard the voice of God—"*Adam where art thou?*" Gen. iii. 8, 9, 10. Painful fear, if the heart be not hardened, must follow the absence of the truth from the mind as necessarily as darkness follows the setting of the sun: and while sin is indulged, the truth cannot be influencing the heart. Indifference in regard to the will and the glory of God, cannot be accompanied with the consolations of his spirit.

We err, however, in supposing that, in circumstances like these, it were presumption to pray, and that it is our duty to refrain from it: for the greater our transgressions have been, the more necessary it is to confess them, with our eyes turned to the sacrifice of Christ, and with fervent supplications for mercy in his name. Ps. xxv. 11, and li. 1—4. We need not be afraid to do so, for he who knows what we need before we ask him, hath expressly invited us to return to him immediately, through Christ; and hath declared that, if "we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John i. 9. Here, then, there is much need for caution; for if, on the one hand, "we are prone to indulge in a false and self-righteous peace;" we are also naturally averse to keep by the only way in which the genuine peace and joy of the Gospel can be had.

To the Saviour then let us go for pardon and purity. If we keep guilt in our bosom, it will only make it rankle. Dangerous as a wound may be at first, it will become much more so if neglected: If allowed to fester, it may end in a gangrene, and so in death. Wisdom calls for an immediate application to the physician and



to the prescribed remedy. Never can peace be recovered but by utterly despairing of help from ourselves, and falling as sinners into the arms of free and sovereign mercy.

David for a time refrained from confessing his guilt, and though he might not entirely abandon devotion, he had no enjoyment in it. Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. He was a stranger to peace, and the prey of vexing recollections, till he went to God, and frankly acknowledged his iniquity, and supplicated forgiveness. When he thus went to the throne of grace, he obtained mercy; and with deep feeling, and in language expressive of his own experience, he wrote the thirty-second Psalm, which commences with a declaration of the blessedness of the man whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Nor did he rest here: He had supplicated the complete cure of his spiritual maladies, and he now blesses God for hearing him, and expresses the sense he had of the blessedness of the man in whose spirit "there is no guile." Ps. li. 10; xxxii. 2, 5. The spirit of duplicity which had led him to conceal his guilt, and virtually to deny it, and which kept him from going to God and fully confessing it, had now been subdued. The confession of sin in the hope of mercy, and gratitude for reconciliation, were connected with simplicity of heart. Sweet indeed in such a case is the message of reconciliation through that blood which has been sprinkled on the heavenly mercy-seat, and through which we again obtain, as at first, pardon and acceptance! This is quite a different thing from working up ourselves into a persuasion, that because God is unchangeable all is well, whatever be our spirit or deportment. Such a persuasion is utterly presumptuous, and partakes not of that confidence which arises from a fresh application to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Against every kind of presumption it becomes us to watch with the most assiduous care. Let no dread however deter us from going to God, with our eyes fixed on the work and mediation of his Son. This



will melt and purify the heart. How bitterly must we weep when Jesus looks on us with kindness, even after we have denied him. Luke xxii. 61, 62.

Another discouragement arises from the prevalence of sloth and indifference. We often feel little fervour—little spirituality—little of the exercise of faith and of love. The mind, feeling cold and earthly, deems it improper to pray. In such a case we ought doubtless to feel deeply, and to be humbled in the dust. They are not to be envied, but pitied, who are unconcerned about the state of their minds, whether carnal or otherwise, and who boast of their correct notions of divine truth, while far from being anxious to glorify God. But still, the remedy is not to be found in keeping back from the throne of our God, because we are sunk into a state of great insensibility to things unseen and eternal, but in drawing near to him with the greater concern ; convinced that the more weak and lifeless we are, the more we need the communications of his grace. If we refrain from prayer, from reading the Scriptures, and from the institutions of Christ, because we feel not that life and comfort which we desire, we are putting from us the *only* things which can cure us of the evil we deplore, and produce that spiritual state of mind after which we are seeking. Prayer tends to subdue evil habits, and it exercises and strengthens holy dispositions : It is also an appointed means of obtaining assistance from above. Let no sense of weakness, then, no temptations, no fears, keep from the throne of grace.

The spirit thus cherished is the same with that which keeps many a trembling sinner from coming to the Saviour, till he can persuade himself that he is better, and so more fitted for mercy. The language of Scripture to such a character is, “Go to the Physician *as you are* ;” and similar is its language to every Christian who keeps back from God, because his mind has become lukewarm or insensible. Should an individual question his Christianity, let him remember that the



Gospel addresses us, not as converted nor as unconverted, but as sinners. If he cannot approach God as a child of his family, let him do it with the prayer and the spirit of the publican. Indeed, even a Christian in the enjoyment of the highest consolation, does not come to the throne of grace on the ground of his being a saint, but as still a guilty creature in himself. Have we sinned against God, and are we still addressed in the Gospel? Surely, then, the question with us ought to be, "Are the testimony and the promises of the Gospel true?" If we doubt their truth, our business is with the evidences of *their divinity*, and not with evidences in *us* of a change of mind. If we suppose, that because faith is the fruit of divine influence, and we have no sense of that influence, it is therefore in vain for us to think of believing, we have forgotten that the power to believe does not consist in some active energy in the mind, but arises from the fulness and clearness of the *evidence* of the truth impressing it. Let the Gospel itself, therefore, occupy the soul, that its glory may, through the divine blessing, influence our hearts: Let the heart dwell on the character of God, the work and intercession of Christ, and on all that the cross discloses: Let it be devoutly turned to the heavenly Teacher, that the soul may be revived, and all that is within us brought under the transforming influence of redeeming goodness. To this remedy let us have recourse at once, for the longer we delay the worse shall we become.

We are ready to be discouraged, also, in the time of deep and distressing affliction, and in circumstances of extreme difficulty. Seeing no visible means of relief, we give way to despondency, and think it is vain to call upon God for what he seems to have denied us. Numb. xi. 21, 22, 23. It were well for you when discouraged in this way to turn to the cloud of witnesses that have gone before you, and to study their characters. Think of the many and great perplexities and entanglements through which they were carried: Observe how they were preserved when ready to fall and



to faint—how they were aided and strengthened when ready to despond—and how they were delivered in circumstances the most perilous and calamitous. Think of the ark in the midst of the deluge—of the rock and the manna, of the cloud and the pillar in the wilderness : Think of the passage through the Red Sea and through Jordan, and of the many interpositions of a gracious Providence which marked the history of the chosen people. See the ancient worthies, through faith, stopping the mouths of lions, quenching the violence of fire, and happy in God, though destitute, afflicted, and tormented : See Abraham giving up Isaac, and Moses enduring as seeing him who is invisible : Turn to the Apostles and primitive Christians, and mark the strength of their faith, and the constancy of their devotion, in circumstances the most trying to nature. In these narratives we see the character and the privileges not of strangers, but of our own family : They are our brethren and companions in tribulation. That which supported and animated them is equally free and sure to us, so that we may well imitate them, who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises. Let all, then, be left in the hand of your God : Trust in him at all times, be your condition what it may. He is a refuge that never fails ; and it is his delight to aid the helpless, to deliver the afflicted, and relieve the distressed.

This discouragement becomes greater, if, having often and long prayed, an answer is delayed. The time fixed by God is, however, the fittest : It is for him to order our lot, and to his will it becomes us to bow : His promises cannot fail ; he is but bringing his plans to maturity. Long did Abraham wait for Isaac, and long did his family wait for Canaan ; and still longer did the church wait for the Redeemer. He waits, and causes us to wait, for the proper season. When it comes, all will be fulfilled. I speak of things which are promised, and not of things which, though he may give, he hath not *said* he will ; far less of things which it were sinful



to ask. With regard to things in themselves good, but which he hath not promised, it becomes us to pray with deep submission to his will, because the things in question may not be good for *us*.

I would here remark, too, that much of what is said in Scripture of waiting on God has a respect to express promises of events connected with the great promise of the Messiah. For him, and for all that was preparatory to his coming, did the people of God under the Old Testament wait: \* In like manner we are now waiting for his second coming, and for all the events, of whatever kind, which are to precede it; and are praying for what is promised in connection with this solemn event. Christians are, accordingly, in the New Testament, directed to the blessed hope of the appearance of Christ as the close of their conflict, and the consummation of their bliss. For this they look and wait, and so have their hearts purified and animated under all their trials and labours. I need not say, then, that passages of Scripture which speak of waiting on God ought not to be indiscriminately applied to favours expected in this life; though, doubtless, the general principle, that God is to be waited on, is established by them, and calls for attention. Though, in regard to what is not promised, we should not get the very things we ask, we may obtain what is better, as you know was the case with Moses. Deut. iv. 23—28; Luke ix. 30, 31. We may not get ease, but we shall be profited: bodily relief may not be obtained, but the heart may be enriched with more than we could ask or think. At all events, prayer will be found a blessing, as a means of sanctifying the soul, and fitting it for the bliss of heaven.

There are times when we are plunged into immoderate sorrow, and so are enfeebled and distracted. We have an example of the effect of this in relation to watchfulness and prayer, in the three disciples who witnessed the agony of our Lord in the garden. They were quite overwhelmed with grief, and were found by the Saviour sleeping for sorrow. Luke xxii. 45, 46.



The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Mark xiv. 37, 38. The weakness of the bodily frame was not of *itself* sinful ; but as it might become a snare, and so the *occasion* of sin, vigilance was required, that so the mind might rise above it, and not be unfitted for the duty of the moment. Nature must feel, and it is not sinful to feel ; but our feelings ought to be guided and regulated by an enlightened judgment. If we give way to the spirit which nurses melancholy, and ceases not to brood over all that is gloomy, we shall become quite heavy with the stupifying influence of desponding sorrow : and, looking entirely to the dark side of things, we shall feel indisposed for devotion, and leave the throne of our Father. Such a spirit is the bane of all confidence. God is viewed as a hard master ; and the mind, being quite unnerved, cannot find pleasure in his service. Such is the influence of the mind on the body, and of the body on the mind, that if, in such circumstances, they are not watched, we may soon refuse all consolation, and write the most bitter things against ourselves. See how David, in the 42d and 43d Psalms, again and again, calls upon his soul to dismiss its dejection and its gloom, and to go to God ; trusting in his goodness, and hoping for all that his wants required, and the covenant of God contained. In this struggle between the convictions of the judgment and the feelings of the heart, and between faith and unbelief, a striking, consoling, and salutary example is exhibited. It sometimes happens that, through the dejecting influence of trouble, the truth, even when the judgment admits it, fails to impart corresponding comfort. The origin of this is but an infirmity, yet it ought to be watched and repressed, for though not in itself criminal, it may become an inlet to evil. It is easy for a person in health and prosperity to tell the afflicted of the promises of the Gospel, but it is quite a different thing to lay firm hold of them in the day of heavy and perplexing calamity. Still, however, it is for us to maintain a conflict, as David did, and as the three disciples ought



to have done, with such infirmities of nature. The latter were exhorted to pray, that their weaknesses might not betray them; and the former poured out his soul unto God, and so found relief.

Allow me to turn your attention to the great things for which we are called to pray. We are exhorted to implore *mercy*. We need this as guilty sinners, and as the subjects of affliction and tribulation. In the former character we need forgiveness, and shall do so while in the body. Our best services are stained with sin, and daily are we transgressing. The prayer of Paul for Onesiphorus, in which he poured out all his heart, was, that he might "find mercy of the Lord in that day." 2 Tim. i. 18. Blessed, indeed, is the privilege of access to the throne of grace, where the Saviour ever pleads, and from whence forgiveness is freely dispensed to all who come to God by him.

But we need also the merciful support and sympathy of our great High Priest, as the subjects of affliction. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, in consequence of having been himself tried in all points as we are, yet without sin; and it is in connection with this view of his lot, that we are encouraged to come to the throne of grace with confidence, Heb. iv. 15, 16. It is not of the first approach of a sinner to the Saviour that the Apostle here speaks, but of the daily and repeated access of believers to him, for the constant assistance and support which they need. We receive mercy, not only when we obtain forgiveness of sin, but also when we are granted all that gracious consolation and succour which our circumstances of distress and difficulty require. This is called *mercy*, because it springs from the tender pity and compassion, the kindness and the benignity of God; and from the sympathizing tenderness of the compassionate and tried intercessor who is within the veil. The Saviour is not only willing to relieve us, but so warmly feels for us and tenderly pities us in all our distresses, because he hath,



in our world and in our circumstances, suffered as we suffer.

That you may be encouraged to draw near with confidence for this blessing, look to the days of the man of sorrows, and contemplate his many heavy and complicated woes. Think of his whole life of pain, and ponder with the deepest interest what Calvary discloses; and learn from all this wondrous history that we have an High Priest, who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them who are out of the way. Mark his confidence of God in the midst of all that seemed to oppose it, and certainly tried it to the utmost. Survey the workings of the generous and disinterested affection of his heart; and remember that all this he endured, that he might by his own experience in our nature, know and feel the difficulties and the trials connected with the lot of his people. In approaching the throne of grace, the recollection of these things will impart humble and holy boldness. The thought of them ought ever to be connected with the cheering consideration, that, though in the highest heaven, he hath not dropped our interests. There with the most unremitting attention he watches over us, and affectionately says, "On me let all thy wants lie." Even amidst the grandeur and adorations of the celestial kingdom, he listens to the prayers of each individual of his people; and is delighted in protecting and blessing the very meanest and the feeblest of his beloved family.

We are called to go to the throne of our Father not only for mercy, but for *grace* to help in time of need. Seasonable *grace*, or *grace* adapted to all our circumstances, and according to our wants is meant. The reference is not to the acceptance of our *persons*, but to that special assistance which we need in particular situations, and which we obtain on special applications, to the fountain of all good. Of this, the free favour of God is the source; and all of it is to be sought as the gift of unmerited bounty. This *grace* assimilates the



mind to its Author, and so fits us for our condition, relations, and trials. Every moment are we in want of spiritual blessings, and of course we constantly stand in need of the grace of God. There are circumstances, however, in which we particularly require it, and in which we especially feel our weakness and dependence. It is our duty, therefore, and also our privilege, to ask seasonable help, in the hope of receiving all that is adapted to times and situations.

In the day of *prosperity* we need grace to keep us humble and watchful, spiritual and heavenly, in our views, dispositions, and deportment. He who preserved Joseph and Daniel, in places the most slippery, can keep us from falling in situations the most flattering to nature. Even in the day of prosperity, Job was exhibited by God as a remarkable example of piety. Many, however, have fallen before it, and become awful monuments of the bewitching influence of the objects of sense. Hence the need of fervent prayer for the aid of divine grace.

In the day of *adversity* we need to be kept patient, submissive, and contented.—We need grace to make affliction the means of reclaiming us from the devious paths of folly and of sin; of calling forth every latent energy of the soul, and promoting our faith, our hope, and our love; of weaning us from all undue attachment to this world of vanity; and of fixing our hearts on God as the only happiness of our souls. The grace of our heavenly Father can make adversity quicken our progress in the ways of obedience, enable us to be useful to others, and form us for the inheritance of the saints in light. We are prone either to despise the rod, or to faint under it; and in vain do we dream of acting with propriety, by means of a supposed stock of wisdom and strength gained by experience. Without fresh and special assistance we shall certainly fall.

I do not mean that a mature Christian has learned nothing in the course of his progress—far from it; but that whatever he has learned, it will be of no use to



him without the divine blessing. God works by means, but their success depends upon himself. The acquired endowments of the most advanced are but means by which He acts, and, of course without his gracious blessing they cannot produce the desired effect. The grace of God alone can make affliction the means of bringing forth "the happy fruit of righteousness," Heb. xii: 11, by cherishing that self-denying, meekly resigned, and heavenly temper of heart which adorned the character of Christ, and which is the very essence of holiness, and the happiest state of mind at once for this world and for that which is to come. The troubles of life when thus blessed, invigorate the principles of genuine religion, prepare for the sacrifice of our own will, habituate us to the contemplation of things unseen and eternal, and lead us to aspire after spiritual enjoyments. Let us, then, pray that in the day of trial, we may receive that grace which can make affliction the means of attaining ends so exalted, holy, and blissful.

This will be found particularly necessary, when we are assailed with reproach and opposition for the sake of religion.\* In this case we have in a special manner fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and we may confidently look to him for support and for comfort. Then, too, in a particular manner, we are called to follow Him, whose glories shone in their brightest lustre when in this cause he became obedient unto death.

In the time of temptation we need special aid from above. If you are tempted by the things or the men of the world, by the flesh or by Satan, imitate the servants of Christ, who in such circumstances became fervent in prayer; committed themselves to him who had overcome in their cause;—without whose permission nothing could assail them;—and who was able to preserve them. He himself was tempted, but he overcame by faith in the divine word,—and he hath promised that, through the same means, we too shall be victorious.

When called to arduous and self-denying duties, we



stand in special need of aid from on high. Abraham, when called to leave his kindred and his home, and, still more, when called to offer up him in whom the world was to be blessed, is an example of this.—Moses and Aaron were often thus tried; and Caleb and Joshua had a very difficult part to act on the return of the spies, and the murmuring of the children of Israel. The Apostles and their assistants were frequently engaged in duties the most embarrassing and trying. Their minds, however, were supported by the encouraging reflection, that they could do all things through their Lord who strengthened them. When we are placed in situations of difficulty, and have duties seemingly opposite to perform, and duties requiring great wisdom, meekness and firmness, and also many sacrifices, let us have recourse to him who learned the difficulties connected with obedience, by the things which he suffered, Heb. v. 8.

Prayer for assistance in duty ought to be connected with the faithful discharge of it. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us. Psal. lxvi. 18. In relation to what I have said of waiting for an answer, I would remark, that to continue doing what is wrong, because we are praying and waiting for the removal of the occasion of our error, is quite inconsistent with the word of God. In this way not a few act, and mistake that for waiting for an answer to prayer. Is not this saying, that one part of the will of God is in opposition to another?—Is it not saying, that evil may be done in order that good may come? And is it not sanctifying sin itself, as if the cause of Him who is infinite in wisdom and almighty in power, as well as immaculate in holiness, could require for its support a temporary breach of his own laws. Whatever may be said of his overruling evil for good, his providence is not the rule of our duty. It is for us, as little children, to learn the will of God from his word; to obey it with alacrity; in the way of *obedience* to pray for his kingdom; and to leave all consequences with him. All our



calculations about usefulness, while neglecting the will of Heaven, resolve themselves into the wisdom of this world.

Forget not, my dear friend, that we are very incompetent judges of what we really need. We are too apt to be guided by our feelings, rather than by our judgment. Our heavenly Father knows what we need, and he consults our profit more than our feelings : He looks into eternity, and arranges our lot so as best to secure and increase our enjoyment of bliss in the world to come,—when all his glory shall be displayed, and his ways vindicated. The Lord heareth prayer ; and though you may not always obtain the very thing you ask, yet you will obtain what he sees to be better for you. Paul prayed thrice, that his trouble might be removed : It was not removed, but yet his prayer was heard. His Lord said to him, “ My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is displayed in thy weakness.” This satisfied the apostle, so that he said, “ Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may be displayed in me.” 2 Cor. xii. 9. This, so far from being an objection against the love of God, is a most striking proof of it. Earthly parents may, and sometimes do, hurt their children, by giving them all that they ask ; but our heavenly Father is infinitely wise, and he manifests his love in a way worthy of his wisdom and knowledge. He is a sun and a shield ; and what is truly good for us he will assuredly give.

There are many things which tend to our hurt, concealed under circumstances which to our view have no connection with them, but yet they are all known to God ; and being so, he denies one thing, not on its own account, but because it would lead to other things which might hurt us. This should teach us to submit to his will, and to exercise the most willing resignation to the dispensations of his providence. He may allow one calamity to overtake us, to preserve us from a greater, or to pave the way for the bestowment of the very great-



est of blessings. We see but a short way, but His eye at one glance sees through eternity. Hence it is that He is not so moved as we are by present events : He views present occurrences as they stand in relation to futurity ; and he acts accordingly. This is a consolatory thought, and ought to lead us to this conclusion, that what he is pleased to give, we should enjoy with gratitude ; and that what he is pleased to inflict, we should bear with patience.

In this world of vicissitudes we may expect changes in our lot ; and at such seasons we require much grace, that we may conduct ourselves as becomes pilgrims and strangers, who are heirs of the heavenly inheritance, and are waiting for the Lord from heaven. A change in circumstances often detects what was not in the least suspected. Such a time is truly a time of need. Often has it occasioned a departure from the truth ; but it has also been blessed as a means of leading to it, and of growth in the knowledge of it.

In anticipating futurity, and, in particular, our dissolution, we need to look with deep seriousness to the guide of our lot, and to the conqueror of death. Our great High Priest is able and ready to lead, comfort, and support us with his rod and his staff, while passing the valley and the shadow of death, and to conduct us to the abodes of perpetual peace, happiness, and glory. Ps. xxiii. 4. Jonah ii. In the last hour we may be sorely tried ; but if we “ look again to the holy temple ” of our God and our deliverer, we shall find that the wondrous and the gracious scenes exhibited on the heavenly mercy-seat, connected as they are with the Cross and the appearance of the Lamb there slain, will dissipate the gloom of the grave, and enable us to glory in the warmth and the perpetuity of that love, from the benefit of which neither death nor life can separate us. Rom. viii. 35—39. Blessed, indeed, in that hour, is the hope of the heavenly inheritance, where neither sin nor suffering shall ever be known ; and where the voice of praise and of thanksgiving shall for ever be heard ! How



delightful the thought, that the whole of the celestial city will be a temple for God and the Lamb, where the glory of Jehovah shall shine in its utmost effulgence in the face of the Redeemer, illuminating every part of the Sanctuary, and transforming every worshipper into his image !

That the enjoyment of this blessedness may be your happy lot, is the prayer of,

My dear friend, .

. Yours, &c.

## LETTER XVI.

### HINTS ON THE PROPER METHOD OF INSTRUCTING INQUIRERS.

Importance of declaring fully the demands of the Law—Not necessary to defer stating the Gospel till the mind appear to be awakened—All instruction to be connected with the doctrine of the Cross—Christ the centre of all Divine truth—The importance of stating correctly the ground of human obligation.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You will remember the conversation we had on the best method of introducing the truths of Scripture to an inquirer. This is a matter of very great importance : and, with a view to assist you in your endeavours to do good, I shall now, agreeably to my promise, suggest to you some hints on the subject. I feel it difficult to descend to minute particulars on it, because much must depend on the circumstances of individuals—on the way in which they have been accustomed to think on religious subjects, and on the kind of observations they may make on what is said to them ; I shall therefore confine myself to general topics.

If we follow, as we ought, the examples of Scripture, we shall begin our instructions by directing the attention of an inquirer to those parts of the word of God



• which treat most directly of the character of God, the state and character of man, and the Gospel of peace. Men cannot be convinced of sin without some idea of the character and law of God ; nor of their need of deliverance, without a conviction of guilt and a sense of danger ; nor of the importance of salvation, without a sense of the evil and demerit of transgression. It is therefore proper to state, at the very commencement of our instructions, the righteous demands of the divine law, the condition of man as a sinner, and the utter impossibility of his being justified by deeds of his own. Such subjects, even when the inquirer is already acquainted with them, ought to be pressed on the conscience with the greatest seriousness ; and the solemn language of Scripture regarding them ought to be employed, to awaken to a due sense of their importance.

It is not necessary, however, to refrain from stating the Gospel till such statements as these appear to be clearly understood, and powerfully felt. The fact is, that scarcely is there an unbeliever in a country where the Gospel has been preached, who is altogether destitute of a consciousness of guilt, and at all times free from distress of mind. There are remaining traces of the divine law in every man's heart, and there is a voice there which witnesses for God. Men may, and often do, make strong endeavours to obliterate all impressions of sin and of danger, and to silence the clamours of conscience ; but, in defiance of all their efforts, conscience is not completely quieted, but at times causes no small concern and distress. Now, in this state of mind, that Gospel which brings the salvation of God near to the guilty, is, when its glory is discerned, most acceptable to man. If then such is the experience of men in general, it is not necessary to refrain from stating the Gospel to them till a certain preparatory process has been gone through, subsequent to our admonitions. The apostles did not thus limit themselves. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, after he had charged his hearers with the guilt of murdering the promised Mes-



siah, stated the sum of the Gospel before they discovered that they felt the force of the charge. Acts ii. In the following history, we find him addressing the people of Israel on their sin in crucifying the Prince of Life, and, before any discovery had been made of this having been felt, preaching to them salvation through Jesus. Acts iii. 12—26, and iv. 11, 12. Paul followed the same course in Antioch in Pisidia. Acts xiii. 25—41.

To withhold the invitations of the Gospel till we think a person sufficiently convinced of sin, and then to introduce them as something to which he is entitled, is to act very unscripturally. The Gospel may be freely declared at all times; for there is such a connection between one part of truth and all other parts of it, that if one part is understood and embraced, all others which are implied in it, even such as, in the order of nature, go before it, will follow it.

None, it is true, will believe the Gospel without seeing that they stand in need of it; for without a conviction of sin and of danger, that evidence of its truth, which consists in its perfect suitableness to the guilty and ruined circumstances of man, and to the character and government of God, cannot be discerned. But it is only in connection with the declarations of the Gospel, that the law of God produces genuine penitence. All the agony which a conviction of guilt may occasion, will, while a sinner is unacquainted with the Gospel, only lead him to despair, or to some self-righteous course. If he come to Christ under the notion that his alarm and penitence qualify him for the benefit of the atonement, he is blind to the import and the glory of the saving truth. Such is the tendency of the preparatory schemes to which I advert.

It ought to be remembered, that, in the Gospel itself, the guilt and the lost state of sinners are revealed; so that, if the more particular statements of these by themselves should have been without much or any effect, the view given of them in the Gospel may, *along* with those statements, produce all that is necessary. It is



impossible indeed to give a just exhibition of the Gospel as a scheme of deliverance, without, at the same time, declaring the guilt and condemnation of man, from which it is designed to save. On this principle, it is easy to see why Philip began with preaching Jesus, Acts viii. 35, and why the apostles dwelt in all cases on the doctrines of Christ and him crucified. 1 Cor. i. 22—24, and xv. 1—4. 2 Cor. v. 18—21. Not that they did so without exhibiting the divine law; but that they stated the law and the Gospel together. I mean not that contrition is produced by nothing else than the revelation of mercy; or that conviction of guilt is not produced by the law. By the law, certainly, is the knowledge of sin; but the death of the beloved Son of God is the strongest demonstration that its awful curse cannot be dispensed with. It deserves particular notice, too, that, till a man believe the Gospel, convictions of sin are *forced* upon him. Till then, he is afraid to take the law into close and proper consideration; but having seen the glory of the work of Christ, he says, “Search me, O God, and show me the errors of my way, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

One man is led to see his guilt by a strong view of the law of God, as was the case with the jailor of Philippi: Another, in hearing or reading of the cross of Christ, and that he died to expiate sin, is, in the first instance, struck with a conviction that sin must be exceeding sinful; and that as a sinner, he is exposed to extreme danger. The former, by comparing his spirit and deportment with the law, becomes sensible of guilt; and the latter, by pondering on the death of the Son of God, for the purpose of making atonement, and of magnifying and making honourable the divine law, becomes persuaded that there is in sin all that is base and malignant. The former may struggle against his convictions, and endeavour to escape from the light of the precepts and threatenings of Scripture; but, if he be under divine teaching, he will find this to be impos-



sible: The latter will naturally turn to the law, and on viewing it in itself, and in connection with the cross, and on comparing himself with the delineation of its spirit in the character of Christ, he will be deeply impressed with a sense of his contrariety to it, and will humble himself in the dust. The former individual, should his convictions and alarm be blessed as the means of leading him to inquire after the Gospel, and should the truth be perceived by him, will also be led to the cross; and there, however deeply he may have been convinced of sin before, he will become much more so, and the latter will feel that the attractive power of the love and the compassion of the Saviour increases in proportion as his sense of guilt and of his natural wretchedness comes to be deepened, though it was an affecting display of the divine love which, in the first instance, influenced his heart. It follows that, though every believer of the Gospel sees his need of it, or, in other words, is convinced that he is a sinner, and that he can be saved only through Christ; yet it is not necessary that a person should, for a certain period, experience a particular agonizing process of conviction and alarm, before he can derive comfort from the atonement. Some have been the subjects of such a process; but others, who have been as deeply sensible of sin, have been kept from feeling this horror of mind, by receiving clearer and more immediate views of the riches of redeeming grace.

The message of mercy sets before men a finished atonement,—the benefit of which is to be obtained, not in the way of striving to make ourselves better, but in that of believing or receiving the testimony of God as true. To this method of acceptance none are more opposed than those who deem themselves qualified for the divine mercy. Their fancied qualifications blind their minds to the true glory of the Gospel. What a mercy, when such are enabled from the heart to say, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ!” Phil. iii. 7. When, on looking back, they are made



to see that all their endeavours, and even their religious services, have been designed to establish what God has determined to put down, and are led, from a conviction that there is nothing between them and everlasting perdition but the work of the Saviour, to cast themselves on him as their whole hope and confidence.

I would remind you, my dear friend, that some again are plunged into affliction, and are made to feel that all below is vanity ; and feeling a want which nothing here can supply, they are led to inquire into their state. Object after object has been followed—here, there, and elsewhere, happiness has been sought, but all in vain. In the day of prosperity, the mind, though not satisfied, was diverted ; but adversity has come, and all is involved in gloom. A man in such a day of distress comes to himself, as did the prodigal son, Luke xv. and Manasseh, 2 Chron. xxiii. 12, 13. Finding nothing substantial in the world on which to rest, he asks if there is any way of relief, and, if there be, what it is ? In such circumstances, the Gospel when stated to him and blessed of God for the enlightening of his mind, is found to be all that he needs. There is a conscience in man which often alarms the stoutest heart ; but unhappily its voice is frequently stifled : yet when his forlorn and unprovided state is disclosed, the inability of the world to meet his necessities is discovered ; and when in the Gospel firm footing and the hand of a friend are presented to *him* who had neither, the voice of conscience is readily heard. To the blessed Gospel of peace the heart bows with delight. The mind of the unhappy sufferer is softened, and he hears with pleasure of the blessedness of the servants of God, and of his unbounded goodness to all who return to him through Christ. Luke xv. 17—19. Here the law, the Gospel, and the afflictions of life all concur to produce the effect.

Every opportunity should be embraced of pressing upon the mind, that the Scriptures address us as



already guilty and condemned—as under the power of sinful principles—as wretched and helpless—and as altogether unworthy of the least of the divine mercies. This is to be done, not merely by stating the general doctrine of human depravity, but by fully depicting the character of man. We should employ the actions of the life to prove the state of the heart; for the fruit shows the nature of the tree, and the stream the nature of the fountain. If we confine our attention to the outward evils of the life, we act in relation to the soul as a man should do in regard to the body, who was all attention to some external eruption, and unmindful of the internal state of the system.

On the other hand, there is a vague general way of descanting on the depravity of the heart, which makes no impression, because there is no delineation given of the workings of sin. Accordingly, it sometimes happens that persons who are loud and constant in their complaints of the corruptions of their hearts, are exceedingly offended if charged, however gently, with any particular transgression. The fact is, that such characters, in some way or other, consider the corruption of their hearts as an excuse for the sins of the life; or else they are the subjects of some vague and indefinite feelings, which they mistake for a conviction of depravity and of helplessness.

Let us then bring the truth home to the heart. We shall be assisted in doing this by the many appeals of Scripture to the conscience, as to what we are and what we have done—what we suffer and what we dread—what we desire and what we need. In a great part of the first three chapters of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle dwells on the natural character of man; as also in the second chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, and in parallel passages. Much of human nature is seen in the Gospel histories, and particularly in that of John. In the writings of the prophets we often meet with the most pointed descriptions of the human heart, and the ways of the world: In their



writings there are also given the most striking representations of the present scene, and corresponding with the inward convictions that are generally felt regarding it. In Scripture history there is much both of the ways of God, and those of man, exhibited; and particularly in that part of it which is biographical. These all furnish matter for instruction, and serve to produce and to cherish serious impressions in the mind; and particularly when that consistent and full view which the Gospel gives of the divine character is stated along with them. In this way ought we to take the favourable opportunity which affliction presents, of leading the inquirer to the law of God, with its awful sanctions; and also to the Gospel of peace, with its precious blessings. Thus will be mingled the law of Heaven, the message of mercy, and the providence of God; which all serve to illustrate each other. The first serves to awaken the conscience, the second to engage the affections, and the third, by means of the ills and sorrows of life, to excite and influence the principle of self-preservation, and the desire of happiness. Some are, in the first instance, more accessible in one of these ways, and some in another, and hence that variety which marks the leadings of God in bringing sinners to himself. Now the great thing, surely, is to be indeed brought to him, and not the order in which the work commences.

We ought never, my dear friend, to forget that the great design of the Scriptures is to testify of Christ. John v. 39, 46. Rev. xix. 10. It is of the first importance to press upon inquirers the necessity of receiving this testimony, and the guilt of neglecting it. It will be found to be no easy thing to convince them of the sin of unbelief. They may be convinced, by the operation of the law upon the conscience, that they have neglected many good works, and have done many positive evil deeds,—in a word, that they have in one way or other broken all the commandments; while they have no real conviction of the sin of unbelief. They



may indeed in words allow that they are guilty of it ; but what they mean by unbelief is, not the rejection of the testimony of the Gospel, but the want of certain devotional feelings, and holy dispositions ; or perhaps the difficulty they have to persuade themselves that they are Christians. That any particular individual is a child of God, is no part of that testimony which God hath given in his word : This a man comes to know only when he has believed that message, which is true whether he believes it or not, and the rejection of which is the sin of unbelief. The Saviour has told us, that the great work of the Spirit is to convince the hearers of the Gospel of sin ; because they believe not in Him. John xvi. 8, 9. Now this conviction is produced by his persuading them of the truth of the Gospel. John xvi. 10, 11.

In endeavouring to instruct inquirers, it is then of the first importance to keep in view, that Christ and him crucified is the central point in which all the lines of divine truth meet and are united. This doctrine is that on which the apostles delighted to expatiate on all occasions and in all circumstances, 1 Cor. ii. 2. Not that with constant repetition they declared the same thing, but that, in all the many and various subjects which their ministry included, the doctrine of the cross held a prominent place, and was most closely interwoven with all their instructions. They were not satisfied with constant statements of the ground of acceptance, and of the impossibility of being justified by law ; but dwelt on the whole of the divine commandments, and on the solemn warnings and denunciations connected with them. Acts xiv. 15—17. xvii. 22—31. xxiv. 26. Rom. ii. 1—6, 17—29. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. The medium through which the Spirit works is not the Gospel exclusively,—but the whole of his word. John iv. 17, 18, 20. 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. He, of course, convinces the sinner, not only of the sin of unbelief, but of all other transgressions. When any part of truth is impressed by Him upon the mind, it leads to



the other parts of it ; but a conviction of the guilt of unbelief does certainly distinguish the subjects of his influence.

With this view of His operations, the place given by the apostles to the doctrine of the cross is in perfect harmony. Accordingly there is not a doctrine in Scripture which they do not represent as having a relation to it ; there is not an invitation, or promise, or threatening, or encouragement, that is not built on it ; and there is not a branch of practical piety that is not enforced by the motives it exhibits. This is quite a different thing from representing unbelief as if it were the only sin of the unconverted ; or self-righteousness as almost the only sin of which they are in danger. To teach only one thing, and to teach all things in connection with their proper centre, are quite distinct methods of instruction. This latter method will not narrow or cramp our instructions. There is no danger of unvarying sameness, if we keep in view the numberless connections in which the Scriptures place the doctrines of God, while they still keep the work and character of the Saviour in view. Accordingly, in reading them, there is always a freshness in the truths they declare—there is always something new seen ; and we find the bearings and the relations of the same truth to be endless.

In addressing mankind at large, they dwell in particular on that truth which contains the foundation of hope. The acceptance of a sinner does not depend upon his being acquainted with the whole of revelation, but upon his belief of the plain and short proclamation of mercy through Christ, which is ~~soon~~ stated and easily remembered—which is level to every capacity—and which commends itself to the conscience of every man.

It is an error to represent divine revelation in general as the object of justifying faith. The disbelief of any Scripture truth with which a person is acquainted is doubtless a sin ; but there is one radical comprehen-



sive truth—namely, the testimony concerning Christ, the belief of which is the means of salvation.

The faithful statement of this testimony, and the affectionate statement of the promise of salvation to every one who believes it, which is implied in the encouraging declaration appended to it, "He that believeth shall be saved," ought not to be considered as an improper exhibition of consolatory topics. It were certainly highly unscriptural to address a person as a Christian who has not given evidence of having received the love of the truth, and to speak to him in this state as an actual partaker of the blessings of the Gospel; but it is a very different thing to preach to him just as he stands that blessed message of reconciliation which was proclaimed to the murderers of Christ, the impure Corinthians, the jailor at Philippi, and such like characters. It were wrong to teach such that, *immediately* on their receiving the gospel testimony, they shall enjoy all the *high* consolations which are enjoyed by the advanced disciples of the Saviour; for the exalted joys of the latter are connected with their matured assurance of faith, and their growth in grace: It were still worse to teach, that a recent convert may expect at once to enter on the enjoyment of the rich communications which are connected, as, for example, in the apostles, with a course of active labour and heavy persecutions in the cause of God. But still we may in perfect consistency with these statements, set before them the promise of such comfort as was obtained by the Ethiopian eunuch, and the jailor at Philippi. This is quite a different thing from representing a sinner as called to appropriate the exalted joys referred to, while he has not embraced the gospel, or when he first receives it. But yet every sinner ought to be informed that the blood of Christ is all-sufficient to declare God to be just in forgiving him, ungodly as he is; and that, on believing the gospel, he shall obtain mercy.

On the testimony concerning the Saviour, with the belief of which salvation is connected, all our instruc-



tion should turn. Not that every discussion should have Christ for its immediate object, or that every other subject must be viewed as legal; but that every truth should be stated in relation to its work and character, and in connexion with the gospel, if not as expressly taught, at least as fully implied. We ought never, I may add, to confound names with things: it is not, for example, by constantly repeating the appellations and titles given to the Saviour, nor by ringing changes on the names of his offices, that his doctrines are taught. His name is his *character*, and of this all other things are but illustrations. The histories, predictions, and figures of the Old Testament have all a reference, in one form or another, to his atonement, character, and salvation. Even Adam was a figure of our Lord. Rom. v. 14. The constitution established with him was introductory to the establishment of the gospel kingdom.

It is of great moment to guard inquirers against looking back to the fall as an apology for their sins, and indulging therefore in the vain dream that they are guiltless. Ezek. xviii. 2. Let them be called to reflect on the solemn fact, which is attested by their own conscience, as well as by Scripture—namely, that we all sin voluntarily, and of course are criminal. Prov. i. 30, 31. Psalm lxxxi. 11. John xv. 22, 24. Let them be directed to the many good things which they enjoy, and particularly to that Gospel which proclaims to them a Saviour, and, through him, a blessing far surpassing the life lost in Adam. Set before them that glorious light which shines forth from the darkness that has followed the fall:—in a word, direct them to the second Adam.\*

It is of great importance to show the inquirer that the Scriptures ascribe the necessity of the Spirit's influence to the depravity of the heart, and so to exhibit it as to deepen a sense of responsibility, of guilt, and

\* See a compendious view of the *Adamic* and *Mediatorial* Dispensations. Part II. Section VII.



of unworthiness. Our aim should be, to produce a feeling of helplessness, and a conviction that this, instead of excusing him, is the result of his own wickedness, and thus to induce him to implore mercy as a lost sinner; and such prayer, offered in the name of Jesus, will be heard. Till a sinner despairs of any help from himself, he will in reality reject the Gospel, though in words he may assent to it. But let him be brought to feel his true situation, and he will fall into the arms of sovereign mercy, encouraged at once by the atonement of Christ, the invitations of the Gospel, and the promised aid of the Spirit. The helplessness and depravity of sinners is met by a solemn assurance, that on coming to God in the name of his Son he will pour out upon them the influence of his Spirit. Prov. i. 23. Luke xi. 13.

It is the great work of the Spirit to testify of the person, character, and work of Christ, and so to lead us to see the true glory of his righteousness, and to rest our all upon it. John xvi. 13, 14. Hence the importance of leading an inquirer to every part of truth as it bears upon him, and of directing the anxious soul to seek the aid of this heavenly teacher. When taught by him, we see all truth in Jesus as its centre. It is, for example, in the Saviour, that the character of God is displayed and vindicated. John i. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6. Col. i. 15. Heb. i. 3. The fact of a distinction in the Godhead is never introduced as a matter of mere speculation, but to throw light on the plan of redemption through him. In the scheme of salvation, the Father appears declaring the displeasure of the Godhead; but in love sending the Son to make atonement, that he might be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly;—the Son as finishing his work on the cross, and then going into heaven, to act as Mediator on the ground of his accepted sacrifice;—and the Holy Spirit, as giving effect in the souls of men to the work of the Redeemer. John iii. 16. xiv. 16, 17, 26. xvi. 7—11. Rom. viii. 3. 2 Cor. xiii. 14. Matt. xxviii. 19. Isa. lix. 21.



The *divinity* of the Saviour is taught us in connexion with his incarnation, *Isaiah* ix. 6.—with his character as a mighty deliverer, and an affectionate and tender shepherd, *Isaiah* xl. 10, 11.—and to illustrate his character as a pattern of love and of condescension, *Phil.* ii. 5—8. The truth concerning his person as *Emmanuel*, is taught us in connexion with the different characters in which he appears as God and as man, *John* vi. 33, 62; with the cause of his sufferings, *Zech.* viii. 7; with the guilt of his persecutors, *Acts* iii. 15; with the atonement he hath made for sin, *Heb.* i. 3; with his victory over death and the powers of darkness, *Heb.* ii. 14, 15; with his priestly character, *Heb.* ii. 17, 18. iv. 15, 16. v. 1—5; and with his government of the church and of all worlds, *Isa.* ix. 6, 7. *Deut.* vii. 13, 14. It is in him that we see the divine law and government honoured, *Isaiah* xlii. 21: From him come all the blessings of redemption, *1 Cor.* i. 30, 31; his character is the pattern after which we are formed, *Rom.* viii. 29 *1 John* iii. 2; the influence of the Spirit comes to us through him, *John* xvi. 7; and all holy principles are cherished by abiding in his word, *John* xv. 1—7. *1 John* ii. 24, 28. *Eph.* iv. 16; every privilege is enjoyed through him: In a word, the river of the water of life proceedeth “from the throne of God and of the Lamb,” *Rev.* xxii. 1; and when we reach the full enjoyment of heavenly bliss, our song will be, “Worthy is the Lamb to receive all honour, and power, and glory; for he hath redeemed us to God by his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God, even his Father,” *Rev.* v. 9, 10.

Every duty is to be discharged “in his name,” or under the influence of his cross, and as the sacred act of a priest unto God through him, *Col.* iii. 17. The relative duties of husbands and wives—those of parents and children—and those of masters and servants, are enforced by motives drawn from his character, *Eph.* v. 22—33. vi. 1—9. Every duty which we owe to our neighbours, and likewise every personal duty, is en-



forced by the consideration of the mercies of God through him; as is evident from the commencement of the twelfth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, which is obviously connected with all the practical exhortations that follow, whether they relate to the most common affairs of life, or to the peculiar profession of Christians. In a word, all our obedience is to be yielded as a thank-offering and a "spiritual sacrifice," Col. iii. 17. Heb. xiii. 15, 16. through him. Indeed, if the doctrines of the Gospel are not stated, we are endeavouring to build without a foundation. If, again, they be stated without habitually insisting on their sanctifying influence, the foundation will be left alone, and of course utterly useless; or, rather, we have not properly laid the foundation at all, for, if it be laid, the superstructure will in a measure rise.

It is of great moment, my dear friend, to point out the principles on which all duties are enforced in Scripture. It is true, that the peculiar motives of the Gospel can only be regarded by those who know it; but yet every man who has heard it is bound, by the authority of God, to believe it, and under its influence, to keep all his commandments. "I will stretch out mine hand," says God, "and I will cut off them that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Molech; and them that are turned back from the Lord, and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired after him," Zeph. i. 4—6. We are thus taught, that God will not only punish the worshippers of false gods, and those who seek to unite the service of God and Mammon, and those that have apostatized from him, but also those who have not sought him, nor inquired after him. What is the duty of one man, then, is the duty of all men. There is a sense in which it is the duty of all to observe even the peculiar ordinances which were delivered by our Lord to Christians and to the churches. They are not immediately called to keep them; and it were sinful in them to partake of them while not believers of the Gospel. Before the observance of these appointments, there is a



previous duty to be discharged—namely, that of believing in Christ : for without faith there can be no proper principle of obedience in the mind. Yet still it is their duty to keep every divine precept, because they are solemnly called upon by God to keep all his commandments, Gal. iii. 10 ; and are at the same time called to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In believing in him, the heart is turned towards God, and excited to keep every precept of his law ; so that the diseased soul is in the Gospel presented with a cure. If men do not believe in him, they are not only guilty of the sin of unbelief, but are chargeable with all the evils which result from it. No man, then, ought to bless himself in this, that as he is not a Christian, he sins not in neglecting the appointments of the Saviour ; nor ought any to imagine, that, because they make no profession, therefore they may do as they incline. It is a dangerous error to imagine that men are at liberty to assume a profession of religion, or not, at their pleasure. Not that this is a duty of prior concern to faith and a change of mind, but that all are called upon to receive the love of the truth, and to confess it with the mouth. Will a man deliberately hold up his face, and say, “ I care not for God—I will not express the least regard for him ; and since I feel and act thus, I am relieved from all obligation ? Can a man really persuade himself that his obligation to serve God arises from his declaring himself his servant ? Yet this is the spirit of the conduct pursued by many. It is in vain for such to say, that many who profess to be religious, are insincere ; for this will not exculpate them. Every man shall bear his own burden, and shall give account of himself to God. It may be said, that it is more honest to give up with all pretensions to religion, than to make a hypocritical profession of it. No doubt it is so ; but fearful indeed is that course which derives consistency from sin : and what terms can express the audacity of the man whose honesty consists in deliberate and avowed rebellion !

It must, then, be of the first importance to state dis-



tinely the grounds of human obligation, and to expel the sinner from every false refuge.

With this remark I close for the present; and shall, in my next letter, resume the general subject.—In the mean time, believe me to be yours, &c.

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## LETTER XVII.

### HINTS ON THE BEST METHOD OF INSTRUCTING INQUIRERS.

The importance of understanding the way of acceptance—Error of the Jews on this subject—A similar error still prevalent—The happiness of those who are enlightened on this subject—The manner in which a Christian views sacred things—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I RESUME the subject of my last letter, by requesting your attention to the importance of informing inquirers of the nature of the Scripture doctrine of justification. This doctrine, you know, is the distinguishing glory of the Gospel. The forgiveness of sin lies at the foundation of all true blessedness; and hence the apostles began their instructions with preaching this blessing to the world. When their testimony was believed, the guilty conscience found peace, and the troubled heart was filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

It is of the utmost importance to have scriptural views of the ground of acceptance with God. In fact, the proper knowledge of this forms the key to the Bible. Erroneous notions in relation to this subject made the Jews to stumble at the doctrines of the cross. They had laid it down as an incontrovertible principle, that the great design of the Scriptures was to inform them what good things they were required to do in order to obtain everlasting life. They accordingly read them with this notion firmly fixed in their minds, and, of course, merely to ascertain what precepts they were called to obey,



that they might finally be happy. They did not see that the Bible declared them to be already guilty and condemned ; and that, as the law demands perfect and perpetual obedience in thought, principle, and deed, they never could be justified by it. Though they searched the Scriptures, because they thought that in them was revealed the way to eternal life, they utterly misunderstood them. They were right in thinking that the way to eternal life is in them clearly disclosed ; but they erred in supposing that the way there revealed was that of keeping the precepts and institutions of the law, in order thereby to merit the Divine favour.

The Old Testament no more teaches that salvation is by works of law than does the New. Its language is, "Come, let us reason together : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isaiah i. 18. "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness : I bring near my righteousness—it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry," Isaiah xli. 12, 13. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory," Isaiah xlv. 22, 25. Such passages, however, did not lead the Jews to turn the eyes of their minds to the Messiah, and the great work which he was to finish. There was a vail upon their hearts in reading Moses and the Prophets. The law of their revered leader was quite perverted. They rested in the law itself, without looking to him who is the end of it for justification to every one that believeth. Rom. x. 3, 4. Acts xiii. 15. Their minds were blind to the important fact, that the leading design of the Scriptures was to testify of the person and sacrifice of Christ ; and to direct them, as guilty and helpless sinners, to his atonement for pardon and acceptance. The consequence was, that when the Saviour appeared, "they would not come to him that they might have life ;" and when his apostles preached him as the substance of the typical economy, "they contradicted and blasphemed,"



John v. 40. They totally misunderstood the important lessons taught on the subject in the passover, the daily sacrifice, and the unceasing flow of blood in the sanctuary. Almost all things were purged by blood; and without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins. Heb. ix. 22. These rites were explained by the promises and prophecies respecting the Messiah. It was declared that he should make his soul an offering for sin, and should bear the sin of many; and that, on these grounds, he should, by the knowledge of himself, justify many, Isaiah liii. 10, 11, 12. It was likewise predicted, that he should finish transgression, and make an end of sin—make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness, Dan. ix. 24. To him, in a word, gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whoever believed in him should receive remission of sins, Acts x. 43. To all these precious statements, in which were written, in legible characters, the divine plan of justification through a propitiation, the pride and self-righteousness of their hearts had completely blinded them.

The Gentiles, who had not the benefit of the written revelation of the will of God, and who pursued not after the blessing of justification, but were living in a state of utter carelessness about it, when they heard the Gospel, were not influenced towards it as the Jews were. No doubt the principle of self-righteousness, which is deeply rooted in the hearts of all men, was in them as well as in the Israelites; but it had not been cherished by them in relation to the Scriptures, as it had been by the Jews. The latter imagined that they already understood them, and had the blessings which they unfold; but this the former could not for a moment suppose. The result was, that when the Gentiles heard the Gospel, they were not so prejudiced in relation to this subject as were the chosen people; and, by the blessing of God, "they attained justification, even the justification which is by faith." On the other hand, the Jews, who were busy in pursuing after the law, or the rule or prin-



ciple according to which justification was to be obtained, did not attain the knowledge of that principle, and, of course, did not attain to the blessing itself. Rom. ix. 30, 31. The very natural question, How did the Israelites fail of obtaining the knowledge of the divine plan of justification, seeing they had in their hands the revelation of Heaven upon the subject, and were employed in the study of it? is thus satisfactorily answered. In searching this revelation, they did not examine it with a mind unfettered by prejudice, and open to whatever it might teach. On the contrary, they read the Scriptures with a firm conviction that they were designed to answer the question, "What shall I do that I may obtain life everlasting?" They accordingly sought the knowledge of the divine method of justification, not by looking simply to the testimony of God, but by converting every part of Scripture into a system of directions how best to merit the favour of Heaven. They of course "sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law;" and so stumbled at the doctrine of salvation through faith in the finished work of the Redeemer.

The Scriptures, it is true, are designed to inform us of the whole of our duty, both to God and to man. They set before us the extent and obligation of the Divine law, and declare that every instance of transgression exposes to its curse, Gal. iii. 10. They do so for the purpose of vindicating the character and government of God,—to convince us of sin,—to persuade us of our need of a Saviour,—and to teach us the nature of salvation. They exhibit our state as a state of disease, in order to show the suitableness of the remedy which they reveal. They do not tell us, then, that we are diseased, and call upon us to be well, without setting before us the means of recovery. What are exhortations to duty without exhibiting scriptural motives to obedience, but doing this foolish thing? Had the Jews understood this, they would not have viewed the Bible as a system of directions to obedience, by which, without regard to the



Redeemer, they were to "enter into life." The more clearly they saw, as they imagined, the directions in question, the better did they deem themselves acquainted with the plan of justification; and the more that they followed their fancied instructions, the nearer did they think themselves to the blessing of which they were in quest. No wonder that such characters stumbled at the doctrine of the cross. Rom. ix. 32, 33. Such was the character of Paul when a Pharisee, and such was the character of those who, as he says, had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. Being ignorant of the divine plan of justification, they went about to establish their own self-righteous plan, and would not submit to that of God, Rom. x. 1, 3.

Not that their object was purely religious, for they mixed with it the pursuit of earthly things. We wonder at the gross absurdity of the idolater, whom the prophet represents as taking a tree, and employing one part to kindle a fire, and of another part of it making a god, and falling down and worshipping it, Isa. xlv. 10—20. But what better or wiser were the Jews, who observed the same ordinances of religion, partly to establish their reputation among men and to promote their worldly interests, and partly to establish a ground of confidence before God? What better or wiser are men still, when they attend to the forms of religion from a regard to reputation, or to promote some worldly and selfish design; and yet will trust to the very observances which spring from such motives as a ground of hope for eternity? It is not for such to smile at the sottish conduct of the man who makes a god of the very tree with which he had made a fire to warm himself, and to roast flesh for food. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun; we see but different modifications of the same principles.

Many, alas! are still in the same error as that of the Jews. They come to the Scriptures under the persuasion that it is their great design to tell them by what deeds and sacrifices of their own they may procure the



·favour of God and eternal life. This pernicious sentiment blinds their minds to what is there said of the character of Christ, as the only medium of access to Jehovah,—the sole foundation of hope to a sinner,—and the only medium through which the blessing of redemption can be communicated to man.

Sometimes the error I now speak of is defended, by a reference to the case of the young man in the Gospel, Luke xviii. 18—23. On this I have to remark, that the young man imagined that our Lord had come to teach men some *new* rules, by obedience to which life was to be obtained. Our Lord, in reply, spoke to him on his *own* principles; and the spirit of his reply is, “If life is to be had by obedience, there is no need that I should give any new commandments,—those already given are quite sufficient; for they include love to God and our neighbour, which is the sum of all that can be required.” The young man answered, that he had kept them all; and asked what he yet lacked? The Saviour then called him to give all he had to the poor. Now, had the young man really loved God, he would have been ready to do so, when called to it by divine authority. The call was therefore fitted to bring his fancied obedience fully to the test. The covetousness of his heart was thus detected, and consequently his want of that love which is the fulfilling of the law. But while the Saviour endeavoured to convince him of the real state of his heart, he at the same time called him to come to him, and to follow him bearing the cross. The call to come to him, was a call to believe in him; and the call to sell his all and follow him in the path of tribulation, was a call to confess him with the mouth,—to love him supremely,—and, like the soldier at the word of his commander, to be ready to renounce, without delay or reluctance, even what he might love most, and cheerfully to endure the most painful afflictions. The command to sell all and give to the poor was not meant for a general rule, but was given to try the character of this individual. The spirit of the precept is, that our



will must implicitly bow to the will of our God. This case, then, exhibits no warrant for the notion I now speak of.

They who hold this sentiment read the preceptive parts of the word of God with this idea in their mind, "These are revealed to me that, by doing what they enjoin, I may obtain the favour of God, and at last be delivered from woe, and be called to eternal bliss." They read with the same view the command to believe in Christ, and the calls of Scripture to come to him for life. These they join with the commandments which forbid murder or theft, and indeed with all the commandments which regard either God or man; and they consider faith and coming to Christ as just *two* of the many duties which they are called to perform, in order that by this means they may entitle themselves to the favour of Heaven. They speak as if they had a certain quantity of actions to do, and a certain quantity of doctrines to believe. Faith in Christ is viewed as a work which must be performed as well as others, and which serves for little more than to make up the full tale of required duties. If they do raise it a little higher, it is only to exhibit eternal life as a kind of premium for believing. To the absurdity of calling on men to believe for believing's sake, as it were, they seem utterly blind. They see not the nature of the truth to be believed, nor the display which it affords of the true character of man, and of the rich grace of God; and are strangers to the hallowing influence which it exerts upon the heart. They do not consider that in all that they do they are influenced by some sentiment, that faith is, of course, a principle of action, and not something abstract, of which the duties of obedience to the law are quite independent. If in every department, even of common life, faith in something or other must precede every voluntary step, why should it be thought strange that this should hold in religion?

That this is thought strange in regard to religion, is evident from the contempt often expressed for religious



matters of belief. This is often done from a professed regard to what is rational ; but do not the very persons who thus speak, endeavour to make men change their conduct in worldly matters, by endeavouring to change their views and sentiments regarding them ; and would they not think it irrational to act otherwise with those whom they wish to guide by reason, and not by blind force. Whether then is it more rational to expect a change of conduct without a change of sentiment, or by means of it ? I need not answer the question. Where there is a change of sentiment, there is of course a change in the belief or persuasion of the mind ; and is not this just what the Scriptures teach in regard to religion ? Some, however, who act on the principle I oppose, do not in words condemn faith, for they speak respectfully of it. This, however, is merely because the word often occurs in the Bible, and not from understanding. Hence they often say that it is right to believe as well as to act, evidently just because the two are joined in Scripture, without at all perceiving that it is by the belief of the medicinal truths of the Gospel that proper principles of obedience are implanted ; and that without it there can be no acceptable service rendered unto God.

When they read such passages of Scripture as treat of the atonement of Christ, and of the way of justification through him, they do so with the conviction that the thing taught in them is that the deficiencies in their obedience will be supplied by his merits. Still, then, the principle adverted to is in full operation, and governing their hearts. They act precisely as did the Jews in relation to the sacrifices of their ritual, which were viewed by them, not as acts of obedience, which ought to flow from love, and still less as figurative of the work of the Messiah, but as a kind of compensation for the defects which doubtless they would at times admit to be in their services. In a similar light is the sacrifice of Christ now considered by many ; and I may add that Christian institutions are not seldom observed with the



same views. It thus happens that the same use is now made of the one offering of the Saviour, that was formerly made of the many offerings that prefigured it; and that the appointments of the new covenant are perverted, as were those of the old dispensation.

On this principle, it is not difficult to account for the success of the Judaizing teachers, of whom so much is said in the epistle to the Galatians and other apostolic epistles. It is a great mistake to suppose that these teachers discarded Christ, and the doctrine that salvation is by grace, from their system. We find Paul saying to their disciples, "Behold, if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing: For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace." Gal. v. 2—4. Now, it is evident that the apostle is reasoning with them on their own principles; and that he takes for granted they still professed to look for salvation by grace through Christ. Their teachers had artfully mixed truth and error together. They admitted that Jesus died for sin, and that faith in his work was necessary to acceptance with God; but they overturned all this by teaching at the same time, that obedience to the law of Moses was *also* necessary. The same place was in this way given to the observance of the law, and to the atonement of Christ. The pride of man was, of course, nearly as much gratified as when the work of the Redeemer was not introduced at all.

The apostle, in opposition to such doctrines, declares, that if justification come by the law, Christ is dead in vain, Gal. ii. 21. Now, his meaning must be, that if in any sense justification come by law, should it be only in part or along with the Redeemer's work, the essence of the Gospel is overturned; for these men did not teach that it came wholly by law, but only in part. It appears, indeed, from their spirit and conduct, that to allow only that obedience to the law qualified for



mercy, would not have suited their scheme. Now, it is vain for men to imagine that because they do not contend for *Jewish* rites, they therefore are not of the same principles with those perverters of the Gospel of whom we so often read in the apostolic epistles. Surely if the sacrifice of Christ hold a similar place in modern schemes, as did the sacrifices of the Jews in the system of the early corrupters of the truth, the principle of both must at bottom be the same. If acceptance with God be expected on the ground of obedience to Christian appointments,—is not this the very principle which led the others to rely on Mosaic institutions? The Scriptures are in wisdom so written, as that, while they expose existing errors, they also expose the spirit from which they flow, and the radical principles on which they proceed; and so are applicable to the various perversions of the truth which appear in the world, whatever form they may assume.

It must, then, be of the very first moment for an inquirer to compare one part of Scripture with another, and carefully to examine the scope and connection of every book, and of every passage, and the connection of the whole with the Saviour.

In examining such passages as treat of corruptions of the truth; it will be found useful to observe the strong language employed respecting every false view of the way of acceptance with God. Of all corruptions of the Gospel, that is the most dangerous which, while it seems to bring the divine righteousness very near to sinners, in reality sets it at as great a distance as if, in order to reach it, perfection of obedience to the law were necessary. The teachers whom Paul opposes in the epistle to the Galatians could say much on the glory of the Saviour, and on the necessity of his death to take away sin; but what did this avail when the acceptance of a sinner was made to depend on certain qualifications? Such were the characters respecting whom he speaks as enemies of the cross of Christ, and as preachers of another Gospel, Gal. i. 6—9. Phil. iii. 1, 18. In like manner,



men may now say much concerning the dignity of the person and the glory of the work of Christ, and yet deprive what is said of all its use by insisting on the necessity of something being done on the part of the sinner, to *qualify* him for obtaining acceptance through Christ. Thus the inquirer is led to look to himself rather than to the atonement.

When the mind is at first awakened to a sense of want and of danger, the Bible is often resorted to for relief. The inquirer, in reading such parts of it as treat of the divine law and the institutions of Christ, is apt to view them by themselves, and not as connected with those parts of the Scriptures which treat of the present character of man, and of the way of acceptance with God. He may remain a stranger to the connection and harmony of the doctrines of revelation, in consequence of overlooking the motives taken from the Gospel to enforce every duty; which motives are often interwoven with the preceptive parts of Scripture, and which are always to be understood as implied in them. Not seldom are such characters led to commence a course of reformation in their conduct, and even a struggle with the evils of their hearts, in the hope of, by this means, obtaining the divine favour. They may reform—they may pay great attention to the ordinances of religion, and in all their endeavours may be very earnest and deeply serious; but they are labouring to establish their own righteousness. Instead of looking to the cross of Christ for pardon and peace, they view what is said of it as either unintelligible, or as meant to give weight to their sorrows and obedience.

It sometimes happens that such inquirers, when they read of the necessity of faith in order to salvation, imagine that they are not warranted to come to Christ immediately, because they do not find it in them: When they read of the necessity of being born again in order to be meet for the exercises and enjoyments of the kingdom of Christ, both here and in the heavenly world,



and find that they are strangers to this change of heart, they conclude that until they are sensible of being the subjects of it, they ought not to believe in the Saviour, or to come to the Gospel for peace to their perplexed souls. Sometimes, on reading what is said of the influences of the Holy Spirit, they deem it their present duty to do nothing, but to wait till he shall be pleased by some sensible impulse or impression, separate from the truth, to act upon their hearts. At other times, when they read of the effects and tokens of faith—as, for example, of love to the disciples of Christ—they think that, till they feel the effect of the truth, they need not look to the Gospel for relief. I may add, that not seldom do they stumble at what is said of the divine purposes, and of the design of the Saviour in the work of redemption by his death.

Precious to a man in such circumstances is the benefit of a Christian friend who can guide him in his researches, and correct his mistakes,—who can prove to him from the divine word, properly examined and applied, that he errs in searching the Scriptures for the mere purpose of knowing *what he is to do to obtain life*, by showing him that all are already guilty and condemned,—that, as even but one transgression exposes to the curse of the law, we never can be justified by it.—that, while we were in this helpless condition, God sent his Son into the world to suffer and to die for sinners,—and that through his obedience unto death Jehovah appears at once just and merciful in forgiving sin, and receiving the guilty into favour. The question, “What good things shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” is not that which the Bible was intended to answer. It indeed answers this question, but by showing that in order to obtain life in this way, perfect and perpetual obedience in heart and in conduct is necessary. The answer, of course, excludes all hope of justification by law in the case of every transgressor; and shuts up to the way of salvation exhibited in the cross of the Saviour. The unutterably im-



portant question, "How can a sinner be pardoned and obtain everlasting life?" is that which is answered in the gospel, and to answer it is one great design of revelation.

The inquirer will be much favoured, if he has a friend who can, besides this, show him from the Scriptures that the faith with which salvation is connected is the belief of the free and unrestricted proclamation of mercy through the atonement of Christ; and that therefore it cannot be an obstruction to the freeness of divine grace, but is rather a belief of it,—that we become new creatures in believing the Gospel, and that therefore a consciousness of being regenerated is not by any means necessary to warrant us to go to the Saviour for mercy,—that no impulse or impression, coming from the Holy Spirit, can be necessary to warrant us to receive the testimony and promise of the God of truth, and that to wait for any thing of the kind, is to disobey the command given to all, to repent and believe the Gospel; and is to expect, in addition to the revelation of God in his word, some new revelation by his Spirit, who never acts but by means of what is already revealed. It will be well if he be made to see that the effects and tokens of faith must necessarily follow and cannot exist before it; so that to look for them previously is at once unscriptural and absurd. Love to Christians, for instance, is the fruit of faith in Christ; it is, in fact, loving him in them.

It will be of great moment to show him that he ought not to pry into the purposes of God, or the secrets of the Saviour, as if he wished to ascend into heaven to see that his name is written there; but rather to look at once to the Gospel, in which he is most assuredly called upon and besought to come to the Redeemer for life. The general aspect of love to the human race, which is borne in the Gospel, testifying the all-sufficiency of the atonement, as the foundation of the unrestricted invitations, by which all are alike welcome to participate in its virtue, is such that every individual is



warranted to consider it a sufficient ground for his coming to the feast of mercy, and taking the enjoyment of all which is there provided. Since all are bidden, there is no necessity why one in particular should have a more special warrant than another to make his way clear. It is on this principle that the Gospel directs us to the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and proclaims the free forgiveness of sin to all who can confide in it as the sole foundation of their hope. The message announcing this is well denominated "the Gospel," or "good news." It testifies, in particular, that Immanuel appeared on earth to take away sin,—that he bare our sins (*i. e.* the punishment they deserved) in his own body on the accursed tree,—that he had made full atonement for sin,—and that in what he hath done God rests well pleased. There is now no room for the anxious inquiry of the troubled mind, "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord?" He hath showed us in his word what is good, even that in which he is well pleased, and in this he calls us to rest. And what does he require of us as an expression of gratitude, love, and veneration, but that we do justly, in imitation of his love to righteousness,—that we love mercy, as an imitation of that which we have received; and that, under a sense of his holiness and goodness, we walk humbly with him. Micah vi. 6—8. Thus has he performed that good thing which he promised to the fathers, Jer. xxxiii. 15; and hath given us that which comprises all good, Ps. lxxxv. 12. In vain, then, does any unbeliever of this, endeavour to work out something in himself to be a ground of peace before God, whether that something be called faith, a principle of grace in the heart, humility, sincerity, repentance, or in a word, any thing whatsoever, though expressed in Scripture language. It is not even the work of the Spirit in us, but the work of Christ without us, that is the foundation of pardon, and of the gift of eternal life. The work of the Spirit consists in his opening the mind to the glory of the finished righteousness of the Saviour,



and inclining the heart to rest exclusively upon it. The testimony of the Gospel is, "that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," 1 John v. 11. To give does not always mean to put in actual possession of a thing, but often means to exhibit or proclaim it as free for use. Those to whom the bread of life is, in John vi. 32, said to be given were unbelievers, and so had not eternal life abiding in them. To them it was given in the sense of its being exhibited as free for their reception. And thus our Lord explains himself, when, in verse 50, he says, that this bread came down from heaven, that any man may eat thereof, and not die. There is thus laid a sufficient ground for our personal confidence in the grace of God, and for our appropriating the blessings of redemption to our own particular benefit.

What saith the method of justification which is by faith? "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is the word of faith which the apostles preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," Rom. x. 5—10. When the import of this message is stated, the principle in man which leads him to seek acceptance by something done by himself, is decidedly met, and by the blessing of God may be overthrown. When the sinner, who has been labouring as in the fire to establish his own righteousness, comes to see that the word, which alone can give his soul rest, has been all the while in his hands—that it is the very word he was searching and professed to believe, but which he had perverted and misunderstood—he is struck with his blindness, and exults in the riches of the grace of God. He sees that he was engaged in a work as difficult as to climb the heavens, or to penetrate into the secrets of the invisible world,—in a work which implied either that Christ had not come into the world, or that he had not finished his undertaking in behalf of sinners. In the resurrection of the surety, he perceives



the most decisive evidence of the dignity of his person, the perfection of his sacrifice, and the divine complacency in his character and work, Rom. i. 4.; iv. 25.; vi. 9, 10. Heb. x. 11—14. 1 Pet. i. 21. In the testimony and promises of the Gospel, he sees this work brought nigh to him, and he in consequence commits his all to it with confidence.

Thus he, who was before engaged in the tormenting and perplexing course of fighting in his own strength against the evil principles and propensities of his heart, in order to obtain the benefit of the work of Christ, and was happy or wretched according to his ideas of success or failure, is now convinced that the work finished by the Saviour is of itself perfect, and fully sufficient to save sinners. He sees that all his attempts to add to it were vain,—that they were most criminal in the sight of God, and highly dishonourable to the Redeemer. His guilty soul in confiding in this work finds rest,—the tormenting fear and perplexing anxiety which agitated his heart give place to tranquillity and joy,—and the love of God is implanted in his heart.

If Jesus is not seen to be able to save to the uttermost, pitiable must the state of that man be who is alarmed by a sense of guilt! In proportion to the strength of his convictions of sin must be his distraction of mind in the prospect of dissolution. He may look to the right and to the left—he may try many unscriptural expedients to obtain rest to his conscience; but it will be an unspeakable mercy if all of them fail to quiet his alarm. Blessed will he be if he finds that all of them are ineffectual, and comes to be persuaded that it is not by any thing he can do or can be brought to do, but by hearing with faith of what has been done by the Saviour, that he can ever enjoy well-grounded rest in his soul. When a man is brought not to *do*, but “to *hear* that his soul may live,” Isa. lv. 3. he enters into rest. When the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and shows them with the evidence and



glory to his mind, conscience is pacified. Though in fact his convictions of guilt become stronger than before, they are deprived of the horror which formerly accompanied them, arising from the tormenting dread of punishment.

The sinner can now contemplate God as a father and a friend ; and he finds his happiness in serving him and in being conformed to his will. Obedience to God is now viewed not merely as a duty in a subject to his government, but as itself the blessedness of the soul. The different parts of the divine word are seen as they bear on the character of Christ. Precepts and promises, doctrines and privileges, in a word, all the parts of revelation, are contemplated as they stand related to the Sun of the system. The heart enters into the views of the sacred writers who dwell on the character of the Redeemer, as the centre and the life of the whole, and in whose hands every part of truth becomes in a high degree animating and enlivening.

“The Scriptures,” then “are able to make us wise unto salvation” in no other way than “through faith in Christ Jesus.” He is thus all and in all. In the epistle to the Hebrews the subject is discussed at great length. There we have a key to the ancient history of Israel, as an instructive exhibition of the character of Christ, and of that of mankind. There the Redeemer appears as infinitely superior to all the messengers of God,—as the true expiatory sacrifice—the great High Priest of the House of God—the King of the Church—the end of all the figurative rites—and the Lord of all worlds.

In a word, a Christian views all in connexion with the Saviour. If he thinks of God, it is as he is manifested in Immanuel,—if of the law of heaven, he views it as magnified and made honourable by his obedience unto death,—if of sin, he looks to it in the light of the cross, where its evil nature and its awful issue are wondrously displayed,—if he considers his duty, he feels it to be most powerfully enforced by the voice of him who from Calvary beseeches him in accents of infinite love



to flee from sin and to follow holiness and to abandon the vain hope of uniting disobedience and genuine enjoyment. When he forms his estimate of the world, it is by contemplating the character of him who, for the sake of sinners, became poor, and stooped to be a man of sorrows. In this he sees the light in which God in our nature viewed the glories of the present scene.—At the cross of his Lord the world is stripped of its delusive charms, and there he leaves it of choice. If he think of that misery which awaits the worshippers of present things, he turns to the bitterness of *his* heart who was the afflicted one, and from it he learns what the curse of the law includes: If he meditate on death, he looks to the death and the resurrection of his Lord; and on his finished work he rests his hope: If he anticipate the judgment, he remembers that he who shall fill the throne is he who made atonement for sin; and from the tribunal of judgment he turns to Calvary. There, though conscious of much guilt and great unworthiness, he confides in Him as his friend, his benefactor, and his brother; and his emotions are at once peaceful, joyful, and solemn. If his mind dwell, as often it must, on the scenes of eternity, he rests on him who is the resurrection and the life,—who liveth for evermore as a Priest upon his throne in the house of God, and over that kingdom which cannot be moved. When in this vale of tears, he anticipates the bliss of heaven, his eye fixes on the glory of his Lord, and he exults in the hope of being at last altogether like him.

Time would fail me were I to attempt to show you how every thing in Scripture, and in true religion, connects itself with the Saviour. Let these desultory hints suffice. When the mind of an inquirer is divinely taught to perceive the harmony of Scripture and its reference throughout to the character of Christ, he finds that all the parts of revelation open upon his understanding, and are felt in their due influence, in proportion as he becomes increasingly acquainted with the work and excellencies of the Friend of sinners. He is



led from conviction to count all things but loss for the knowledge of the glories of his Lord ; and he studies to grow in acquaintance with an object, at once so excellent in itself and so interesting to him.

It is however by no means necessary, as I have already hinted, that every thing in Scripture should be considered as directly and immediately referring to him. Far from it. Plain historical narratives ought not to be converted into allegories, in order to introduce him ; nor should types be overstrained and forced to speak in a far-fetched or an unnatural way. Much harm has been done by this manner of treating the word of God. The rule is, to keep by the interpretations of the Old Testament which we find in the New, and by the general principles of interpretation which are there established. If we do this, and are guided by the application of those examples and principles by sound judgment, and not by mere fancy,—and if we accompany all our inquiries with fervent and devout prayer to God for the constant guidance of his Holy Spirit, we shall not greatly err.

I have endeavoured throughout, my dear friend, to keep general principles in view. It really is not by mere rules and directions minutely laid down that the Scriptures will be read with profit. General principles admit of many modifications, adapted to the varied and ever-varying circumstances of mankind. The great thing is to understand the way of a sinner's acceptance with God, and the nature of Christian obedience and enjoyment, as flowing from the knowledge and faith of that simple and yet majestic truth “which saves and sets the sinner free.” We are very apt to think of laboured discussions and complex directions ; and so to overlook the important and the encouraging fact, that the sum of all that is necessary to be believed in order to salvation, is often in Scripture expressed in a single short and plain sentence, so that the weakest capacity may understand it. Isa. xxxv. 8.

The way of salvation is beautifully illustrated in our



Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, by an allusion to the mode in which the Israelites were cured when bitten by serpents—namely, by looking to the serpents of brass, John iii. 14, 15. We have a simple exhibition of the same Gospel in the words immediately following this allusion, John iii. 16. There is another comprehensive and simple declaration of it in the passage where Paul denominates himself a ringleader among sinners, and exults in the thought that to save even such Christ came into the world, 1 Tim. i. 15. In many other short sentences we have the substance of the Gospel. This great truth has not seldom been understood and believed by very young children; and it has imparted unutterable consolation to many a mind, which, through infirmity and disease, was incapable of dwelling long with steadiness on any subject, far less of following a long train of argument. The substance of it was understood by Timothy while a child; and must have been understood by Samuel, David, Josiah, and other pious children, of whom mention is made in Scripture, 2 Tim. i. 5.; iii. 15. 1 Sam. ii. 26.; xvi. 7, 12. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 1—3. 1 Kings xiv. 13.; \*xviii. 12. Matth. xxi. 16. In fact, the truth must be received in the spirit of a child. If a man will be wise, he must submit to be reckoned a fool by the men of this world, 1 Cor. iii. 18, 19. It is the glory of the Gospel that it is adapted to man as such, whether barbarous or refined, learned or illiterate, Rom. i. 14. If the individual has previously been ignorant of divine truth, yet when the nature of the Gospel is once perceived, and its power is felt, knowledge will be easily gained; or, if he has had a previous knowledge of the Scriptures, it will soon be applied as it ought. Thus the entrance of the Gospel giveth light to the soul. There is in the Gospel, considered as a whole, that which can occupy the powers of the most exalted angel, and that which, though despised by the wise of this world, can make even a child wise unto salvation.

I remain, &c.



## LETTER XVIII.

## ON JUSTIFICATION.

Introductory remarks—The nature of Justification—Improper nicety to distinguish between the obedience and the sufferings of Christ—The ground of Justification—The moral meetness of the plan of redemption.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM requested by your correspondent here to write you some general thoughts on the Scripture doctrine of redemption, with a particular view to the subjects of justification, the renovation of the character, and the way in which the Scriptures introduce the divine purposes. With this request I cheerfully comply ; and shall endeavour to meet your questions in a plain and simple manner.

The Scriptures unequivocally declare, that all mankind have lost both the favour and the moral image of God. By the loss of his favour we are all legally excluded from his family, and consequently can have no interest in its privileges. Since this loss has been incurred by guilt, it is necessary to its removal that our sins be pardoned, and our persons accepted as righteous. This is a change of *state* ; but, as we have lost the image of God as well as his favour, it is also necessary to our salvation, that we be conformed to the divine character by a change of *mind*. Could we suppose a sinner to be pardoned and admitted into the family of God while no change was effected on his character, he could derive scarcely any benefit from his pardon ; because he could have no relish for the holy and spiritual services and enjoyments of the house of God. Were he even admitted into heaven, its hallowed society and its sacred glories would to him be intolerable ; for happiness does not result from situation, but from an agreement between faculties and objects, desires and enjoyments. No change



can take place in the divine mind, and of course a change must take place in ours ; for happiness cannot be enjoyed while our desires and pleasures, our habits, principles, and pursuits, are all opposed to the character and will of God, and to the exercises and enjoyments of his temple. Were a prince to elevate a slave to a station of eminence, while all the habits of a state of slavery remained, this change of condition, without a change of views, feelings, and dispositions, would embarrass and encumber. There is a suitableness between circumstances and character which is essential to ease and enjoyment ; and it is the glory of the Gospel, that, while it elevates to the family of God, it implants and cherishes a spirit becoming it. Christians are accordingly reminded of the high dignity of their calling, in order to induce them to act in character, Heb. iii. 1. Ephes. iv. 1. This proceeds on a principle similar to that on which princes are reminded of their birth, connexions, and prospects, in order to elevate their minds above every thing unworthy of their rank. Christians are called to enter into the views and the manners of the family into which they are brought : and in proportion as they act in character, they become assimilated to the heavenly world.

The subject will be better illustrated by considering man as diseased, as well as condemned,—in both which lights he is represented in Scripture. 1 Kings viii. 38. Psalm ciii. 3. 1 Peter ii. 24. Should a man be imprisoned, and condemned to death for a breach of the laws, and should he, while in this state, be seized with the jail fever to such a degree as to insure his death by the disease, independently of a public execution according to his sentence, and were he in this state to receive a pardon from his prince,—of what use would it be to him ? His prison doors are set open, but the diseased man cannot leave prison ; his life is spared by his prince, but it falls a victim to his disorder—a disorder, too, occasioned by his crime ; so that the benefit of his pardon he cannot enjoy, further than this—that he escapes



the shame of a public execution. But if his prince, at the time he pardoned him, could rebuke his disorder, and restore him to health, then, and only then, could the benefits of the pardon be enjoyed. The same is the case with mankind. We are under a judicial sentence of condemnation; but we are, at the same time, under the power of the disease of sin,—we are depraved in heart, alienated from God, hostile to his true character and will, and utterly averse from the holy and spiritual blessings and pleasures of his family. Though we cannot but seek happiness, we naturally seek it not in God, but in the creature. The favour of God in his true character is not the object of desire,—the thought of immediate fellowship with him rather pains than attracts us; and a life beyond the grave, in a state of separation from the objects of sense, is considered the ruin of our happiness rather than its perfection. This temper of heart, as well as the dread consequent on a sense of guilt, causes us to shun all serious thoughts of death and of eternity.

If, then, we are not delivered from this moral malady, of what use could forgiveness be to us? We should still be miserable; for sin and wretchedness are inseparable, being, in the very nature of things, connected together by a law as steady and invariable as that which regulates the planets. The misery consequent upon sin does not arise from the arbitrary frown of Heaven, or from the positive infliction of superior power, as if the cause of it were that Omnipotence directs its severe pressure by mere will against the worms of the dust. Far from us be every such thought. When the divine law denounces the infliction of punishment, it declares what will, in the very nature of things, be the effect of sin to the transgressor; it adds its sanction to the constitution of nature. Prov. i. 31. Jer. ii. 19. Gal. vi. 7, 8. Heaven and hell are chiefly to be considered as the names of opposite characters; the former of which is connected with happy effects and consequences, and the latter with all that is wretched and



miserable. Not that either the idea of place or that of the direct and judicial interposition of Jehovah is excluded ; but that his power is to be viewed as employed in placing the impenitent in such circumstances as shall fully allow their unhallowed principles to produce their natural and bitter fruits. They shall be removed from all earthly enjoyments, and also brought into close contact with their Judge ; the consequence of which must be the most acute misery. God is called a consuming fire ; and as it is the nature of fire to burn and to consume whatever is combustible when in contact with it, so, in like manner, such is the nature of the God of purity and holiness, and such his relation to his rational creatures, that wherever beings of a character opposite to his are brought near him, they are, in the very nature of things, rendered unhappy. This must be awfully experienced in that state where, separated from all objects of sense, and in the immediate presence of God, they shall feel the natural effects consequent on sin. In this world there are many things to divert the attention, and to occupy the heart ; but in the invisible state the mind will be left to itself. Think it *must* ; and think of God, and of its own character and condition it *must* ; and being obliged to turn to itself, it will become its own tormentor. Of course, there can be no deliverance from misery, but by a change of the mind from sin to holiness. Till spiritual health is restored, or, in other words, till we are conformed to the character of God, we cannot be happy. If it is the design of God to make us blessed, he must, in order to this, make us holy ; for even the Almighty, with reverence be it said, cannot otherwise make us truly happy. Hence our Lord has said, " Except a man be born of water—even of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." He does not ascribe this to the mere will of God, but traces it to the very nature of things. He does not say he *shall* not enter, but " he cannot enter into the kingdom of God ;" and this is true in relation to this ~~life~~, as well as that which is to come.



Sin, then, is the disease and the bane of our souls: and be where we may, we cannot be happy if its poison is left to rage in our hearts. To complete our salvation, the Redeemer therefore died not only to expiate our guilt, but to sanctify and cleanse us by the washing of regeneration, even the renewing of the Holy Ghost, that he might present us to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that we should be holy and without blemish. Ephes. v. 25, 26, 27.

These two blessings—restoration to the family of God, and restoration to spiritual health—though in themselves distinct, are communicated together. The former is obtained by the death of Christ, as a medium of forgiveness every way worthy of God; the latter is obtained by the knowledge of this fact, and of the truths illustrated by the revelation of it. Pardon is connected with faith in the Gospel of Christ, and the guilty of every class are called upon to believe it, in order to their justification before God.

Having made these general remarks, allow me, my dear friend, to call your attention more particularly to the ground of a sinner's acceptance before God,—the consideration of which will naturally lead to the study of other branches of the doctrine of redemption. It is of the first importance to have scriptural views of the doctrine of justification; “for it spreads itself through the whole system of divine truth; and according as it is either fully established, or superficially touched—clearly understood, or imperfectly apprehended—will the whole of religion rise in genuine glory as a solid structure, or totter to its base.”

The term justification is generally used in a forensic sense, and refers to the proceedings in a court of judicature. It is with this, however, as with most cases in which the ways of God allude to the proceedings of men; for although there are points of resemblance, there are also points of dissimilarity between the one and the other. In ordinary cases among men, the ground of



justification is in the actual personal character of the accused. He is found innocent, and is therefore honourably acquitted. In an earthly court, indeed, a prisoner may be acquitted for want of evidence, when there is scarcely any doubt of his guilt; but though he escapes the direct punishment of law, he is not fully justified, because, being a suspected character, he is not confided in, and does not regain his former standing in society. In so far, therefore, as his justification is incomplete, the reason is that his character is not fully cleared. But the only ground of the justification of a sinner before God is the atonement of Christ, Rom. iii. 23. This blessing does not consist in making a person righteous by infusing into him righteous principles or dispositions, and so changing his character, but in absolving him from the guilt of his sins, and receiving him into favour, and so changing his state in relation to God as his offended Judge. It is the deed of God as a judge; and it stands opposed to a sentence of condemnation. Accordingly it is said that "the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification," Rom. v. 16. "It is God that justifieth," saith the apostle, "who is he that condemneth?" Rom. viii. 33, 34. Among men a person who is condemned may be pardoned, but cannot be justified; for justification in its original and proper sense is incompatible with pardon; it declares the charges brought against the prisoner to be false, and that he is fully entitled to all the privileges of a good citizen. Such is the original and proper sense of the term, and accordingly it is often used in Scripture to signify approbation or a public vindication of the character and conduct of those who are said to be justified. The justification of a sinner, however, according to the Gospel, signifies his being discharged from the condemnatory sentence of the law by a free pardon of all his sins, and the acceptance of him into a state of favour as though he were righteous. In this deed of the Judge he is treated as though his char-



acter were righteous, for the sake of the perfect work of the Redeemer.

Pardon and justification are therefore substantially the same blessing, so far as the removal of the penal consequences of guilt is concerned. The latter accordingly is opposed, as I have already mentioned, to condemnation, Deut. xxv. 1. 1 Kings viii. 32. Rom. viii. 33, 34;—and we are said to be justified from sin, Acts xiii. 38, 39. The term pardon, taken by itself, expresses the nature of the fundamental part of the blessing, and the judicial term justification refers to the medium through which it is bestowed. Pardon respects man as a sinner, and God as gracious in bestowing the favour; but justification considers man as a believer in the propitiation of Christ, and God as a righteous governor discharging him from condemnation through the expiatory work of the Mediator, and accepting him as righteous for the sake of the righteousness of his surety. Accordingly the term righteousness is frequently used to signify the blessing of justification. “If righteousness,” that is justification, “come by law, then Christ is dead in vain,” Gal. ii. 21. “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him *unto* righteousness”—that is, unto justification. Rom. iv. 5. ; ix. 30, 32. ; x. 4.

I would in connexion with this subject remind you, that the term righteousness is sometimes used to signify the whole salvation of the gospel; but it is because it is bestowed in the way of righteousness, and because it chiefly consists in righteousness. Thus the prayer, “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness,” is answered by saying, “I will clothe her priests with salvation,” Psalm cxxxii. 9, 16. Sometimes it is used in the sense of benignity or mercy, Dan. ix. 16. Psalm xxxvi. 10: ciii. 17., but it is because the loving-kindness of God flows to sinners in a channel honourable to the divine rectitude and government. “Deliver me,” says the Psalmist, “and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness,” Psal. li. 14. Now, by righteous-



ness he means mercy or loving-kindness; as is evident from the first verse of the Psalm; but not mere mercy, for he expects the blessing through what was signified by the cleansing of the unclean with a bunch of hyssop dipt in the water of purification: and this we learn from the New Testament was the blood of Christ, Ps. li. 7. compared with Heb. ix. 13, 14. and Num. xix. 17, 18. Wherever, therefore, it denotes *that* mercy or goodness which is the origin of redemption, it also refers to the righteous and holy medium through which it is bestowed, namely, the righteousness of Immanuel.

The ground on which a sinner is constituted righteous in the eye of the law, or, in other words, is treated as though he were righteous, is the righteousness of Christ; and hence the term justification is employed to express the nature and medium of his forgiveness. Pardon, indeed, is frequently used among men to signify merely the discharge of the guilty from the *direct* punishment of the law, and not the restoration to favour and its consequent advantages; and hence a subject whose life and estate had both been forfeited is said to be pardoned when his life is spared, though his estate should not be restored, and though his former intercourse with his Prince should not be allowed, even when every moral as well as every legal barrier is removed, but the forgiveness that is with God includes deliverance from the whole desert of transgression. The penalty of the law includes the deprivation of the divine favour and the suffering of the divine vengeance; both which are comprehended in the final sentence of the wicked, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Neither of these singly, but both of them together, constitute the curse of the law; and therefore, if a sinner is not delivered from both, he is not fully pardoned. When pardon is distinguished from a restoration to a state of favour and acceptance, it is used in the common signification of deliverance from the direct and positive infliction of punishment, and in distinction from that high state of fav-



our into which we are brought through the mediation of Christ.—When used in the full sense of the blessing comprehended in justification, it includes not only forgiveness in this restricted sense, but the blessing of restoration to the divine favour, as though the individual were righteous.

This view of the subject is confirmed by the reasoning of the apostle on the meaning of the Psalmist, when he says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,” Psalm xxxii. 1, 2. This passage is quoted as a description of the blessedness of the man “to whom God imputeth righteousness without works,” Rom. iv. 6—8. It follows, therefore, that the forgiveness of transgression, the covering of iniquity, and the non-imputation of sin, are all expressions amounting in effect to the same with the imputation of righteousness. It is also evident from the connexion, that the imputation of righteousness is the same with justification; and that justification is the same with forgiveness, or at least that they are so inseparably connected as to be used interchangeably. Not to impute sin, is not to lay it to the charge of the guilty person to his condemnation; and not treating him as a sinner, is of the same amount with treating him as righteous, or, in other words, justifying him.

I need not say, that though forgiveness, in the full sense of the favour, restores to a state of acceptance with God, it can, strictly speaking, go no farther than to a restoration of what was lost by transgression. It follows, therefore, that it does not necessarily include a title to that new paradise, and that exalted bliss which shall be enjoyed in heaven, and an earnest of which is enjoyed on earth. The Scriptures, however, represent these blessings as inseparably connected. They who receive the abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, or justification, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ; and as sin hath reigned unto death, even so doth grace reign through righteousness unto eternal



life by Jesus Christ our Lord, Rom. v. 17, 21. Such is the glory of the work of Christ, that God hath promised that all who believe in it, and so are treated as righteous for the sake of it, shall become members of a new and glorious community under him as the head, and shall, as adopted children, reign in the possession of that eternal life which is the reward of the Redeemer's work. We are accordingly said to become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, Gal. iii. 26: for to as many as believe in him, the Saviour gives the privilege of adoption into the family of his Father, John i. 12. In forgiving sin, God acts as a Sovereign Benefactor; but, at the same time, as the Supreme Ruler, pardoning offences against his government, so that pardon is a public, and not merely a personal act. And while he thus forgives sin, he grants us a place in his family, and a title to the heavenly kingdom. Pardon then is connected with that judicial act, by which we are graciously treated as one with the Saviour, and being so, become joint heirs with him of the celestial inheritance.

That these blessings are inseparably connected is evident from this, that when the apostle Paul is reasoning on the ground of a sinner's justification, he represents an interest in the heavenly inheritance as the privilege of all who are justified, and as their privilege considered as *children* of God, and consequently heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. Reasoning on this subject, he says, "If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect, Rom. iv. 14: and again, "If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise," Gal. iii. 18. He closes his reasoning on justification by saying, "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise;" and by applying the circumstances of the difference between a child and heir under age, and one who has reached maturity, to the difference of the circumstances of the people of God under the Old



and New Testaments, Gal. iii. 29. ; iv. 1—7. Having stated, in his epistle to Titus, the spring and means of our salvation, he adds, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life," Titus iii. 7. Such then is the glory of the work of Christ, that when treated as though righteous for the sake of it, we are not only pardoned and restored to the divine favour, but called to participate in the glory of Him in whom Jehovah is well pleased. Believing in Christ, we are viewed as one with him, and being so, we are treated by God as though his work were ours—that is, we are treated as though we were righteous, for the sake of His righteousness, Rom. v. 19. 1 Cor. i. 30. Rom. viii. 1.

Do not, my dear friend, attempt nicely to distinguish between what has been called the active and the passive righteousness of the Saviour: You will gain no advantage by distinctions which ascribe our deliverance from wrath to the latter, and our possession of eternal life to the former. We are said, in Rom. v. 9, to be justified by his blood; and, in verse 19, we are said to be constituted righteous by his obedience. Now, in the former verse, his blood does not exclude his obedience; and, in the latter, his obedience does not exclude his blood. In consequence, indeed, of the nature of our faculties, we must in some respects distinguish between his obedience and his sufferings, in order that we may the more easily understand the whole glories of his character; But it is quite a different thing to make nice distinctions between them the ground of bestowing separate blessings and of separate exercises of faith, in order to our receiving them. The fact is, that he suffered when he obeyed, and he obeyed when he suffered. His obedience, indeed, eminently consisted in his laying down his life for the sheep; and hence, speaking of this manifestation of love, he says, "This commandment have I received of my Father," John x. 17, 18. It was in offering up the body which had been prepared him as a sacrifice for sin that he



did the will of his Father, Heb. x. 7—11. His sufferings and death are expressed by active terms, such as that he gave himself for our sins, Gal. i. 4.—gave himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God, Eph. v. 2.—gave himself a ransom, 1 Tim. ii. 6.—laid down his life, John x. 15.—and offered up himself to God, Heb. vii. 27.; ix. 14. It is by his being made sin—that is, a sin-offering for us, that we are made the righteousness of God in Him—that is, we are justified fully before God by Him, 2 Cor. v. 21. Having said that “It is God that justifieth,” the apostle adds, “it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,” Rom. viii. 35, 36. It is, therefore, by the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, together with his priestly mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, that the whole blessings of redemption are obtained. When the ground or reason of his exaltation is stated, it is accordingly declared to be his having humbled himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, Phil. ii. 6—11.

In fact his giving up his life is eminently that one righteousness by which we are justified. All that preceded his death must be considered as leading to it, and as having its end in it. The redeemed, when in the enjoyment, not only of deliverance from wrath, but of all the blessings of eternal life, express their gratitude by ascribing the whole of their salvation and blessedness to his love in having redeemed them by his blood, and called them through it to be kings and priests unto God even his Father, Rev. v. 9, 10. I do not mean by this reasoning, that to the death of Christ, exclusive of what preceded it, our redemption is to be ascribed, for this were in substance to do what I have blamed. I mean, that as the whole bliss of heaven, as well as deliverance from wrath, is traced to his death, it is wrong to represent it as the fruit only of what is called his active righteousness. It is improper, therefore, to divide his work into parts, and to ascribe one blessing



to the virtue of this part, and another to the virtue of that. It ought rather to be viewed as one grand whole, by which "the law is magnified and made honourable," the claims of justice are satisfied, and the divine righteousness fully declared, both in the forgiveness of sin and in the bestowment of eternal life. The simplicity of the truth is thus made more apparent, and the mind will the less readily lose sight of that glorious work exhibited in the wondrous history of the Man of Sorrows.

Perhaps some have been led to the improper use of the division of the righteousness of Christ of which I now speak, by confining their attention to the pain endured in his sufferings; and not sufficiently considering the hallowed principles, motives, and views which actuated him. The latter, it is true, ought never to be considered apart from the former: but neither should the former exclude the latter, for both of them are connected with the full vindication of the government of Heaven. To the principles, views, and motives of the sufferer God obviously refers, when, expressing his complacency in his work, he says, "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity: therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows," Heb. i. 9. Indeed we can have no proper view of the sufferings of Christ, if we do not deeply consider the exalted and sacred principles which they called forth and displayed; and, on the other hand, we cannot understand the glory of these principles aright unless we ponder on the awful nature and severity of his sufferings. If either of them be viewed apart from the other, the full nature, design, and influence of both cannot be perceived or felt. All that preceded his death was connected with it, and leading to it: By it was his work finished; and hence the attention is in Scripture particularly directed to it; but still it is when viewed as a grand whole that the glory of his righteousness is best understood. In like manner it is by tracing the whole blessings of the Gospel to it as one great



work that its stupendous result is most distinctly discerned.

Consider, for a little, more particularly the ground of our justification. We are told that God had made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God, 2 Cor. v. 21. I need not say that he could not be made sin itself, for sin is an action and not a person. Neither did God really account him a sinner, for His judgment is always according to truth; and he well knew that he had no sin. On the contrary, he delighted in him as distinguished by every excellence, even at the very time that he bruised him and put him to grief. You must be sensible that the sinfulness and moral pollution of our sins could not by any constitution ever become his: It is in the highest degree absurd to suppose for a moment that the act, the criminality, or the moral turpitude of sin can be transferred from the actual sinner to one who is innocent. In direct opposition to such an idea, the Scriptures invariably speak of the sin for which the Redeemer suffered as not his, but ours: "He was wounded for *our* transgressions and bruised for *our* iniquities. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of *us all*. For the transgressions of *my people*," says God, "was he stricken." Isa. liii. 5, 6, 8. "Christ died for *our* sins, according to the Scriptures." 1 Cor. xv. 3. "He bore *our* sins in his own body on the tree," 1 Pet. ii. 24.

The Scriptures employ the word sin not only to denote an action morally evil, but also the guilt of the offender and the punishment which the law has denounced against it. Thus when a man is pardoned, his sin is said to be taken away. Now, as it is impossible that a deed which has been done can be taken away, the expression must refer to the guilt or the punishment legally attached to sin. Thus they who suffered for sin are said to bear their iniquity, Lev. v. 1.; xxiv. 15. and Ezek. xlv. 10, 12. This mode of speech naturally arose from the offering of sacrifices to which the guilt of



the people had been typically transferred. It was thus taught that the bad act might be done by one person, and the punishment be inflicted on another. The latter indeed only endured suffering, for not being himself the criminal, he was not, strictly speaking, punished, but he endured that which was the punishment of the sin of another.

You will perceive then, my dear friend, that when the apostle says that the Saviour was made sin for us, he means that he was made a *sin-offering* for us. This is agreeable to the language of the Old Testament, where the term sin is often used to signify a sin-offering. Thus, in Leviticus iv. 3, the word that signifies sin is rendered sin-offering,—the word “offering” being supplied, though not distinguished in the usual way by *Italics*. The same remark applies to what is said of the law of the sin-offering, Lev. vi. 25.; and accordingly to make a beast a sin-offering is expressed by making it sin, Numb. vi. 11; viii. 12. Nor is this peculiar to the Old Testament, for the same use is made of the term in several places of the New, Rom. viii. 3. Heb. ix. 28.; x. 6, 8; xiii. 11. God therefore made him who knew no sin to be a sin-offering, by constituting him, with his own voluntary consent, the representative and substitute of sinners, and by inflicting on him in this character the full desert of transgression. Could we for a moment suppose that he had really been made the transgressor, and that the culpability of sin had been transferred, what need had there been for repentance, or a change of mind in the sinner? or what room would there have been for the forgiveness of iniquity? The Redeemer in the most voluntary manner took the place of transgressors, and became answerable for them, Isa. liii. 6, 7. Our sins indeed never could become his—they still are and ever must be ours; but their *effects* were transferred to him.

It is unscriptural, however, to represent the union between him and his people as of such a nature as renders them one person, in consequence of which they



may demand salvation and eternal life as their right. The Saviour has an equitable claim for the bestowment of these blessings on believers, but to *them* they are matters of undeserved favour. The Scriptures accordingly invariably represent the hopes of the most eminent characters as entirely built on the riches of divine mercy, flowing to them through the work of the Mediator. By a divine constitution, he voluntarily stood in the sinner's place, as though he had himself been the transgressor; just as the sin-offering under the law was in mercy reckoned to have the sins of the people put upon its head. In the latter case all was figurative, for sin could not be expiated by the blood of bulls and of goats: but the sacrifice of Christ really took away sin. The Saviour, in consequence of having taken the place of the guilty, speaks of the sins of his people as if they were his own, Ps. xl. 12; lxix. 5. Not that they were his own, for that was impossible, since the turpitude and criminality of sin are inseparable from the act, and must belong to the sinner: but that he had become as really answerable for them, as though they were his own. He accordingly suffered their desert, being treated as *though* he had been the actual transgressor. This is a very different thing from his becoming a sinner, as if our sins had actually become his. That they could ever by any deed of his, or of another, become *his* sins, is in the very nature of things impossible; for though the actions of one person may and often do affect others, they never can become actually theirs. Though Jesus suffered for sin, he died the just for the unjust, 1 Peter iii. 18. We ought most carefully to distinguish between his personal innocence and excellence, and the relative responsibility for the sins of his people, which of his own accord he took upon himself. We ought likewise to distinguish between the judicial consequences of sin, and its polluting influence. It were therefore extremely wrong to speak of him as a sinner; for the effects of sin only were transferred to him, and nothing more could be transferred to him.



In like manner his righteousness cannot in point of fact be actually that of his people ; but they are treated as though it were theirs, and accordingly they reap the benefit of it. When sinners are blessed with redemption solely for the sake of his righteousness, it is accounted as theirs, just as when he suffered for their sins they were accounted as his. Still his work is his own, and never can be ours ; but the effects of it are enjoyed by us as much as *though it were ours*. We receive the benefit of his work as a covenanted reward to Him, though to us it is the gift of pure unmerited favour ; just as He suffered the desert of our sins as an expression of the divine displeasure against us, though personally considered he continued the object of the divine complacency. This is all that is meant by our sins having been reckoned as his, and his righteousness being reckoned as ours. There is no reference to a transfusion of qualities, but to a transference of fruits and consequences. When, for instance, we are told that the design of Christ's being made sin for us was in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, the meaning is not that we are made as righteous and holy as God himself is : We are no more by this means made holy as God is holy, than Christ is made sinful as we are. Righteousness here stands opposed to condemnation ; and to be made the righteousness of God, is but another expression for our being completely justified. Justification is accordingly expressed by our being made, or constituted righteous, Rom. v. 19. By our being made the righteousness of God in the Saviour, we are to understand his fully pardoning our sins, and freeing us completely from the guilt and punishment due to them, for the sake of the sufferings of the surety in our stead. The apostle, when treating of the way in which sinners are justified, calls it the righteousness of God ; and says that the law and the prophets bear witness to it, Rom. iii. 21. This justification is called His righteousness, then, because it is God that justifieth, and because he does so on the ground of a righteousness of his own pro-



viding, (Gen. xxii. 14. marginal reading,) as well as because the work on the ground of which he justifies was finished by God Incarnate, 2 Pet. i. 1. Rom. viii. 33. His plan of justification is by faith in the propitiatory work of his Son, for the sake of whom the blessing is bestowed. This is analogous to the common practice among men, who not seldom, in showing kindness to unworthy characters, do it for the sake of one who is worthy. The worthiness, however, of the character for whose sake the kindness is expressed does not render it a matter of debt; for it is nevertheless a matter of free favour to the receiver.

You may relieve the prodigal son of an esteemed friend from regard to departed worth, while at the same time you tell the unworthy youth that you do it not for his sake, but that of his father. This were a manifestation at once of a due regard to the memory of the dead, and of free favour to the living. The son is treated as though the excellence of the father were his; but his being so treated is as much a matter of favour as if it had been quite irrespective of the character of another. For the sake of the work of Christ, in like manner, God justifieth the ungodly on their believing the Gospel.

You will observe, my friend, that I am speaking at present of a change in the sinner's state, by which he passes from a state of condemnation to a state of forgiveness and acceptance; and not of a change of character. But it ought never to be for a moment forgotten, that he who is made of God unto us righteousness, or justification, is also made unto us sanctification: and that the latter is the ultimate object of the former. The method employed to reconcile the exercise of mercy with the claims of justice, is the moral means of effecting a change in our principles and spirit, by which we come to resemble the Saviour. There is accordingly a moral meetness in the mode of communicating mercy through the atonement of Christ. Our offended Judge had love enough in his heart to have saved the guilty without an



atonement, had this been consistent with the honour of his perfections, the claims of his law, the good of the intelligent universe, and the highest good even of the pardoned themselves. But as such a proceeding must have dishonoured his government, and have held up an encouragement to rebellion, his love was manifested in a way which, by the union of mercy and truth—of righteousness and peace, sheds the most exhilarating light on the sanctions of his law, and the justice of his government.

The atonement, therefore, was necessary, not in consequence of any thing like implacability, or a stern, unrelenting character in God, nor even because of a reluctance in him, however small, to the exercise of mercy; but from the necessity there was that the triumphs of mercy should be in full accordance with the claims of justice. From pure and self-moved love he delivered up his own Son to be a sacrifice for sin; and through the honourable medium of his mediation he now pours forth the fulness of his goodness. The atonement of Christ, then, is not the price, but the fruit of his love. John iii. 16 1 John iv. 10. To represent his love as purchased is to dishonour his name, and to eclipse the glory of the Gospel. The love of Jehovah is self-moved, and there is a richness and a freeness in it altogether worthy of him. It was with him as with a righteous governor, who, whatever personal kindness he may bear to an offender, and however keenly he may feel for and pity him, cannot as a magistrate pass by the offence without some public and adequate expression of his displeasure against it, that, while mercy is exercised, justice and the general good may not be sacrificed. Now, in the atonement of Christ, there is an adequate expression of the Divine displeasure against sin, in consequence of the infinite value of his blood. By the value of the Saviour's obedience unto death is to be understood its tendency to accomplish the end designed by it. If so, it is easy to see how the dignity of his person gives value to his suffer-



ings, because it affords such a remarkable display of the justice of the divine law, and of the holiness of the divine character, as to maintain the honour of Jehovah, and to secure the stability of his government in the dispensation of mercy. A law would destroy itself if delivered in these terms.—“ You are commanded to obey, but you shall be pardoned if you transgress.” How different the manner in which God hath manifested his love, and how dignified as well as tender does his mercy appear !

This view of the subject ought not, my dear friend, to be considered as a limitation of the divine power. When you say of a good man that he could not commit murder, you do not question his strength, but you deny that he would use it in an improper way. This surely is not to dishonour him : it is on the contrary to commend him. The application of this to God is easily made. If a judge allows a criminal to escape from justice in consequence of some unprincipled compromise, or for the sake of a bribe, though the love of life would excite a momentary gratitude in the breast of the favoured culprit, yet never could he respect the unprincipled character even of the man who had thus saved his life. I need not say that the gratitude of the former of these must be of a selfish and base description, and the kindness of the latter unworthy of the name.

Mercy dispensed in any other way than that exhibited in the Gospel were cruelty to the community at large. The execution of a just penalty as much belongs to a good and gracious governor, as the prescribing of good and equitable laws : They are, indeed, one and the same thing when viewed in relation to the collective system. The grace of God is, indeed, absolutely sovereign and free ; but it is exercised through a medium which exhibits it as in strict accordance with infinite wisdom, and with the unbending equity of the divine government. Mercy and grace, if dispensed contrary to law and justice, were in fact also contrary



to goodness, because opposed to the general interest of the intelligent creation. The sufferings of the Redeemer became the soil out of which every excellence grew to infinite perfection: They were the means of exciting and manifesting all the righteousness that human nature in union with Deity could exhibit; and thus they at once glorified God, and benefited his creatures. While they expiated sin, they so manifested the divine character as to be the great means of furnishing a remedy for the moral maladies of man, and at the same time the strongest preservative of all holy intelligences from the commission of sin. The Scriptures, accordingly, represent the work of the Redeemer as the cause of heartfelt joy to the whole of the heavenly hosts. What a different view had been given of God if sin had been pardoned without a proper expression of the divine displeasure against it; and who can calculate the evil effects which in that case had been produced on the moral system! Had his grace been manifested in this way after all that his law had said, how could he have been revered? Such is not the grace of Jehovah, but the foolish fondness of weak compassion, which even men when possessed of magnanimity are above. Even in the brightest displays of his goodness, he is not exhibited as a Being who is all mercy and fond indulgence, but as a God of justice and unsullied holiness, while at the same time he appears as the God of love. His grace did not prevent the condemnation of sinners, but delivers them from it: It does not induce him to dispense with the high claims of his law, but to magnify and make it honourable in the means of forgiveness. If it be said that because God is love, we may therefore expect him to save sinners without an atonement, it may be replied that he is also just, and that therefore we need not expect him to show mercy at all. The latter argument is as good as the former, because his justice is equal to his mercy. An offence committed against the king as a man, or as a private individual, he may forgive



without any public satisfaction; but an offence committed against him as a king, and of course against the state through him, is a crime which cannot thus be passed over without betraying his trust, and invading both law and justice. The royal prerogative in pardoning offences, it is presumed, will ever be exercised according to the design and spirit of the law, and not to its dishonour and the consequent injury of society.

Whence is it that men plead for the divine mercy at the expense of the divine justice, but from an unwillingness to admit what is implied in the Scripture doctrine of redemption? Often is there a vague, or even a confident, reliance on the divine mercy thus viewed apart from justice, at the very time when the Gospel displays the most delightful harmony between it and the high claims of the divine righteousness. From this display the mind turns away; and pertinaciously clings to a kind of mercy which is nothing but pitiful weakness, or an unprincipled indifference to all that is just and venerable. It is doubtless true that Jehovah delighteth in mercy; but to suppose that he exercises it at the expense of righteousness, and consequently to the ruin of his creatures, is to impeach his character, and to contradict the whole tenor of the Gospel. An error on this subject is fearfully dangerous. The most important and interesting question that can possibly engage our attention is—How shall a sinful and polluted creature find acceptance with the God of truth and of holiness? we need a revelation which can support the mind in the clearest view of the divine character, the most enlarged view of the divine law, and the fullest view of our own guilt and pollution,—a revelation which can with these views furnish a ground of hope in the hour of dissolution, and in the immediate prospect of standing before Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire.

Now, the Redeemer, by his obedience unto death, hath vindicated and glorified the perfections of God,



and satisfied the claims of the law : He hath displayed his justice and holiness, by exhibiting the evil of sin, its awful consequences, and the divine abhorrence of it. In this wonderful transaction the riches of his grace and the rectitude of his character are made manifest in perfect harmony ; and his infinite knowledge and wisdom are laid open in this combination of righteousness and mercy. The law of God is thus magnified and made honourable ; so that the Saviour might well say, " Then restored I that which I took not away," Ps. lxix. 4. The justice of Heaven, which in connection with the law appeared to be an insuperable bar to the salvation of sinners, is more illustriously glorified in their redemption than it could have been in their universal condemnation. This is a revelation of the divine character, in which there is such a combination of mercy and justice—such a display of God as at once a kind Father and a righteous Judge—and such a suitability to the circumstances of a sinner ready to perish, as is admirably calculated to relieve the mind of the most guilty of men, in the most deplorable circumstances in which he can possibly find himself in this world of woe.

It is refreshing to dwell on this plan of salvation, and to observe the progress of the new creation as it advances from its commencement to its consummation. There is an unspeakable happiness in tracing the marks of that love which moved the Saviour to engage in this work. To his blessed cross all must be ascribed. Through his work God hath become propitious to sinners ; and hence it is said that his anger is turned away : Not that there is in him a change from hatred to love ; for the propitiation of Christ respects not the production of love, but its consistent and righteous manifestation. Anger in man is often a turbulent passion prompting to revenge ; but when applied to God, it must be separated from every thing that implies mutability, imperfection, or evil : It expresses his decided abhorrence of sin, and his determination to punish



it: It is not the sudden effervescence of passion, but the wise, calm, and dignified expression of his high regard for truth, rectitude, and goodness, and his benevolent zeal for the moral order and happiness of the universe. He is to be considered in the light of a public ruler, vindicating, for public and for private purposes, his government from contempt. In reference to mankind there are two aspects in which he ought to be regarded. He is the common father; he is also the righteous governor. And it is in the latter character that wrath is ascribed to him. It is necessary in the administration of the moral kingdom which he has established, that he maintain the honour of his government. But this is not in the least inconsistent with the benevolence of personal feeling towards offenders, for his wrath is of a judicial character. In civil society, punishments are necessary; and the magistrate who inflicts them is said to be an avenger to execute ~~wrath~~ upon him that doth evil. This by no means implies that he punishes with passion or personal hatred: On the contrary, every thing like this in a judge is reprobated in all civilized countries; and the most severe judgments are pronounced and executed, not only with calmness, solemnity, and dignity, but often with deep and tender sympathy and commiseration. You will see, then, that when God is said to turn from his anger, the meaning is, that as the grounds on which he had, in his just displeasure, separated sinners from his fellowship are honourably removed, he can now, in the harmonious exercise of all his perfections, reverse the sentence of condemnation, and embrace them as his children.

The way in which sinners come to be partakers of the benefits of redemption, I shall consider in my next letter.—In the meantime, I remain, &c.



## LETTER XIX.

## ON FAITH AS THE MEDIUM OF JUSTIFICATION.

The nature of faith—Its connection with Justification—The evil of discussions about the manner of believing—Importance of the object of Faith—Hindrances to it—Its influence corresponds with the nature of its object—Is connected with trust in the Saviour—Has its immediate issue in coming to Christ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my former letter I considered the nature and the ground of Justification : allow me now to direct your attention to the medium through which this blessing is obtained.

I need not tell you that Faith is this medium. Sinners become partakers of the blessings that flow from the atonement by believing the Gospel, Acts xvi. 29, 30, 31. Rom. iv. 5. Gal. ii. 16. In regard to the nature of faith, I have only to remind you that it is giving credit to a report. Like every other simple operation of mind, it does not admit of strict definition : yet every person may easily understand what it is. The general nature of it must in all cases be the same, however different may be its objects, degrees, or effects. The Scriptures accordingly use the term faith in the same sense in which it is employed in common life. When applied to the Gospel it means giving full credit to the divine testimony concerning the person, character, and atonement of Christ, and to the promise, that whosoever believeth on him shall have everlasting life. A prejudice has been contracted by some against this view of it, in consequence of their having confounded the mere profession of faith with faith itself. Many, indeed, profess to believe in Christ who are evidently strangers to religion ; but the Scriptures refute the pretensions of such, not by giving laboured descriptions of faith, but by distinctly stating the truth to be believed, and as distinct-



ly stating what are the natural effects of believing it ; they declare that the salvation of Christ is a present and not merely a future salvation. If a man then profess to believe the Gospel while he lives in the indulgence of sin, he must either be making a hypocritical profession, or deceiving himself by believing *that* to be the Gospel which is altogether different from it. If this is not allowed, then the declarations of Scripture respecting the sanctifying influence of the truth are falsified : “ But let God be true, and every man a liar.” To the law and to the testimony let the appeal ever be made. In the word of God, the conduct of Christians is frequently appealed to as demonstrating the excellence of their principles ; and these principles are always represented as flowing from the natural influence of the object of their faith. In religion there are no useless truths—no harmless errors.

The apostles invariably direct men to the testimony which they are called to believe, and to the evidence of its truth which accompanies and is contained in it ; and in this way endeavour to produce faith in it. Their aim in preaching the Gospel was to convince men of its being true ; and, taking it for granted that all knew what it was to believe a truth, they never perplexed their hearers by bewildering distinctions about faith itself. The difference between believing man and believing God arises from the unutterably high importance of the testimony of the Gospel above every human report, and the full credit due to God, who neither deceives nor can be deceived ; and accordingly faith in Him is illustrated by faith in man, 1 John v. 9. Many, however, are deeply perplexed in consequence of overlooking the truth to be believed, and of an anxious desire to discover in what *manner* they ought to believe. They view faith as some difficult condition which must be performed, in order to entitle them to the salvation of Christ. They do not see how a persuasion of the truth of the divine testimony can save the guilty and give peace to the conscience, because they discern not



the freeness of the grace of God, and have mistaken views of the nature of his salvation: In a word, they look on faith as an arduous and complicated work, which must be done by them in a particular way; and they expect to be justified by it as a work. This is in fact seeking to be justified by works of law, under the name of faith; and is but a refined way of perverting the Gospel. Faith is indeed the intelligent, voluntary exercise of the mind; but it is an exercise of the mind to which we never in common life attach any idea of merit;—and hence the reasoning of Scripture on the difference between justification by faith and by works. Who ever supposes that the exercise of a malefactor's mind, when he believes that the pardon sent him has the royal signature, merits that blessing? (And yet it would be the duty of the subject of a righteous king to give credit to what his sovereign declared by his attested signature.) And what more merit can there be in a sinner's believing the message of reconciliation, which declares that "God was by Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them?" As well might a man imagine that there is a merit in his believing that the sun shines, when it is before him in its meridian lustre. The common sense of mankind tells them that there can be no merit whatsoever in believing the report of a credible witness. Accordingly, such as oppose the doctrine of salvation by grace, and yet are unwilling directly to teach that it is obtained by works, contend that faith in Scripture is to be understood in an unusual sense, and not in its ordinary meaning: They include in it most, if not all, of its effects—even every pious and benevolent disposition of heart, which is in fact to identify it with the complete fulfilment of the law. According to this scheme, salvation is of faith that it might be my merit. I need not say that this is directly to contradict the doctrine of Scripture.

The apostle says, that to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith



is counted for, or unto, righteousness—or justification, as the word righteousness here means. Rom. v. 5. Gal. ii. 21. We are here taught that, on believing the Gospel testimony concerning the work of Christ, a sinner is treated as though *he were* righteous for the sake of that work. This is the simple meaning of the expression, “His faith is counted unto justification.” A Christian, of course, does not *work out* his justification by believing: but on the contrary, he believes *unto it*, or he thus comes to obtain it as the gift of God through the work of Christ. Rom. x. 5—10. The apostle uses the expression “counted unto” when explaining the language employed concerning Abraham, in Gen. xv. 6.; but he means the same thing as when he in his usual manner, says that we are justified by faith. This expression, it has been observed, may be explained by what is said of the faith of such as were miraculously cured. Our Lord said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” “According to your faith be it unto you,” Matth. ix. 22, 29. It was the power of Christ that cured them, yet they were cured by it only when they believed he *had* it, and consequently came to him for the benefit of it: So it is the work of Christ by which a sinner is justified: but he is justified by it only when he believes in his sufficiency to justify him, and in the confidence of this, commits his all into his hands: “As to him that worketh not for his cure, but believed on him that healed the diseased, his faith was counted unto healing; so to him that worketh not for his justification, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted unto justification.” To count, or impute, signifies in this connection to reckon to one what does not properly belong to him, in consequence of which he is treated as though it *did* belong to him. Thus it was said to the Levites, “And this your ~~have~~ offering shall be reckoned (or counted) unto ~~you~~ as though it were the corn of the ~~threshing~~-floor, and as the fullness of the wine-press,” Numb. xviii. 27, that is they should be treated as though they had offered that



which they did not offer. Paul, speaking to Philemon of Onesimus, says, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account," Phil. 18, that is, treat me as though I were the debtor. Speaking of the Gentiles, he says, "If the circumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?" Rom. ii. 26. Now when it is said that his uncircumcision shall be counted unto him for circumcision, the meaning cannot be that it is actually counted to him; for it is a merely negative thing, and therefore cannot properly be reckoned to him: the meaning must be, that he shall be treated *as though he were* circumcised, by having granted all the blessings of the separated people of God, of whose separation to Jehovah circumcision in its highest sense was a sign. In like manner, when God is said to have counted faith unto Abraham unto his justification, the meaning is, that when he believed in the promise of the Messiah, he was treated as a righteous person for the sake of him in whom he believed. When God is said to count faith unto justification, the meaning is, that he justifies us through the medium of that which in fact is nothing—that is, nothing in us, nothing that can from its nature be in any sense or degree the meritorious cause of our acceptance before him. It therefore amounts to nothing more than this, that he justifies, or treats us as though we were righteous, of pure free favour, or without any meritorious cause in us, for the sake of that righteousness on which our faith terminates, which is reckoned to us as though it were our own, in order to our enjoying its reward in our justification. To have faith counted unto righteousness is the same thing then with being "justified by faith," Rom. v. 1.

To impute sin is to lay it to the charge of the offender, in order to his condemnation; and what is this but to treat him as a guilty person? Not to impute sin, therefore, cannot mean that the offended person actually comes to think that the offender has committed no offence, but simply that he treats him *as though* he had



not. To suppose for example, that when Shimei begged of David not to impute iniquity to him, he meant to ask that the king would actually deem him innocent, were perfectly absurd. At the very moment that the request was presented, Shimei said, "For thy servant doth know that I have sinned," 2 Sam. xix. 19, 20. All he intended was to express his earnest desire that David would not treat him as an offender by *punishing* him as his offence deserved. In like manner, when God justifies a sinner through faith in the atonement, the meaning is not that he looks to him through a false medium, and deems him to be what he is not, for God must ever judge of him as he really is; but that for the sake of that sacrifice in which he believes, he treats him as *though he were* righteous, Ps. xxxii. 2. Rom. iv. 6, 7, 8. Faith justifies, as it credits the full sufficiency of the atonement to justify us, guilty as we stand, before God, and as it has its immediate issue in submitting to the righteousness of God, or to the divine plan of acceptance through Christ. Rom. x. 3, 4. The confidence in the Saviour which is thus produced unites the believer to Him, who thus comes to be treated as one with Him. Phil. iii. 9. But it were as improper to say that faith itself is the ground of confidence, as to say that the weary man rests on his act of resting, and not on the thing he bears upon, which would be quite absurd. The whole efficacy of faith in the matter of justification arises from its object; it is but the medium through which the blessings of redemption are communicated, and not the cause of their communication.

Faith ought not to be considered as the condition of the new covenant. It is necessary that a man eat bread before it can nourish him,—not however as a condition, but because, from the very nature of the thing, bread cannot otherwise be of service; so it is with the faith of the Gospel. I do not mean that the correspondence holds in every respect, but that in certain respects the one thing illustrates the other. The whole efficacy of faith in the matter of justification arises from its object, in



which is contained the real ground of our acceptance with God. Accordingly, it is not by the belief of any or every thing whatever that God has testified, without regard to its nature, that we are justified, but by the belief of the *particular* testimony which he hath given concerning Christ, in which is revealed the sole ground of forgiveness—namely, the perfect righteousness of the Saviour, Rom. iv. 23—25 ; v. 18, 19. 1 Cor. xv. 1—4. The work completely finished by him is the only foundation of acceptance ; and the benefit of that work is conveyed to sinners by means of the divine testimony or report concerning it. There is a wide difference between doing a thing ourselves, and believing that it is already done by another. The former is labour—the latter is not ; and hence the reasoning of Scripture on the difference between being justified before God by works of law and by faith in Christ, Rom. iv. 3, 4. Gal. iii. 2, 12. Even a child may understand the difference between being justified by what we *do*, and being justified by or according to what we *believe*.

Great is the perplexity in which many are involved in consequence of analyzing the operations of their minds, without keeping the Gospel itself steadily in view. When we believe any faithful testimony, the declaration believed affects us agreeably to its nature ; and we are no farther sensible of doing so than as it thus impresses us. Faith is built upon evidence ; and when the evidence of the truth of any testimony impresses the mind, we instantly give it credit. If a person of veracity testify to us any thing of importance, and give such evidence of its truth as the case may require, do we not instantly believe him without reasoning on the manner of doing so ? Were a person told good news respecting his affairs and his family, his mind would at once fix on the intelligence communicated ; and, if satisfied of its truth, he would rejoice and immediately take the necessary consequent measures. It would never occur to him to spend his time in inquiring whether the exercise of his mind in believing



the tidings was of the right kind. When we contemplate an object, our minds are not employed in thinking of the manner of seeing it; we think only of the thing seen. If, when looking on any painting, or on any interesting piece of scenery, we begin to reason on the laws of optics, and get into a discussion relative to the way in which the power of vision is produced, we instantly forget the object before us. In like manner, in believing the Gospel, we are not directly thinking of any exercise of our minds, but only of the thing believed, and its relation to our eternal interest. Keep then the object of faith in view; for it is by hearing of it, and not by any abstruse reasoning, that the belief of the heart cometh, Rom. x. 17. It is not by analyzing the workings of our minds when believing in Christ that the heart is purified. When we ruminatc and reason on the manner of believing, we forget the great truth to be believed. In this state of mind, though the object of faith were in some respects before us, yet the heart, being occupied with its own operations, must be kept from discerning the glory and feeling the influence of the doctrines of the cross.

These remarks apply not only to the case of those who are kept from the truth by perplexed views of the nature of faith, but also to those whose views of it are just; for while the former are held from the great object of faith by their confused notions of faith in it, the latter are sometimes so much occupied with what they deem their *clear* views of this subject, that they forget the truth to be believed as much as the others. The more scriptural that our views of the truth really are, the more shall we live out of ourselves, the more humbly shall we glory in the cross of Christ, and the less shall we feel disposed to boast of any real or fancied difference between us and others. The human heart is deceitful, and there are dangers on all hands. The remedy is to dwell on the word of the living God, and to beware of being turned from it by the inconsistencies of any who, by their self-complacency and contempt of



others, make it manifest that, with all their professions of humility and of confidence in the divine mercy, they belong to the same class with him who said, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

The doctrine of salvation through the work of Christ is in itself most encouraging and gladdening ; and the effect of believing it is peace of conscience before God, and a degree of enjoyment proportioned to the sense we have of the divine favour through the atonement. But if we have mistaken the nature of the Gospel, or doubt its truth, or have the mind drawn off to something else which, though called the Gospel, and believed to be it, is in reality distinct from it, or opposed to it, we cannot of course enjoy what the truth when discerned in its true import and glory, is fitted to impart. The great question respecting faith is—What is the thing believed ? Is it the truth of God, or is it not ? Most carefully ought we to examine what we believe, and try it by the word of God. That which many believe, is not the Gospel, but something falsely so called. They believe this something firmly ; but what of that ? Salvation is not connected with the belief of whatever we may *think* is the Gospel, but with the belief of what in reality *is* the Gospel.

When we consider the many erroneous systems which have been sincerely believed to be the gospel, we must be satisfied that a man may be really convinced by external evidence, and even by parts of internal evidence, that the Scriptures are a revelation from God ; while by misunderstanding what this revelation is, he may be believing another gospel. • To constitute a man a Christian, the belief of Christianity *itself* is necessary, and not merely that the Bible is divine. In other cases we always act on a similar principle ; for we should never think of calling a man a follower of the philosopher Bacon, merely because he believed that the writings bearing his name were written by him, if he denied the principles which they teach. I need not say then that the mere consciousness of believing something which is



deemed to be the gospel cannot be an evidence that we believe the truth. The question<sup>is</sup>, what is it that we take to be the gospel? Is it really the testimony of God? This demands the most careful attention, and an answer must be sought in the divine record itself. Not a few have long studied the Scriptures, and in many things have been useful to Christians, who have manifested total ignorance of the true character of Christ, and of the way of salvation through him. Now we cannot, properly speaking, believe what we do not understand in the meaning of the reporter. Not to understand him is really to disbelieve him; for not only do we credit what is untrue, but from this are necessarily led to disbelieve the real truth of the testimony. A person therefore who believes that Jesus is a Saviour in a different sense from that intended in the Bible, believes an untruth, and disbelieves the genuine gospel of peace; but all the while he may, on the ground I have mentioned, be persuaded that the Scriptures are divine. Thus Agrippa is said to have believed the Prophets, because he believed that they were inspired; but as he mistook their contents, he did not in the full and proper sense believe them; for to do this was to believe what they *meant*, and this, I need not say, could only proceed from a right *understanding* of their meaning. Though we should be persuaded of a person's veracity, yet if we misunderstand what he says, we may believe the very opposite of what he has declared; and therefore, though in one sense we believe him, in another we do not: That is, we believe him to be a man of truth, but the thing he has declared we do not perceive, and of course do not credit. I am far from meaning that unbelief is owing to simple ignorance, or merely to a false perception: it is not so. The erroneous views which men, with the Bible in their hands, form of the gospel of Christ, are owing to their aversion to its holy and humbling doctrines. All I mean at present is to show the unutterable importance of the question, "What do I believe to be the gospel of Christ?" You cannot fail to see its im-



portance, if you consider, that not only is forgiveness connected with the belief of the truth, but the change of the mind and progressive sanctification are affected by its means, James i. 18. 1 Peter i. 2. 3.; ii. 2. Error you know, cannot renew or sanctify the heart, but must rather corrupt it; so that the mind gets more and more diseased by it, and may ultimately come short of the salvation of God; and hence the many warnings of Scripture against corruptions of the truth, 1 Tim. iv. 16. 2 Tim ii. 17. 2 Cor. xi. 5.

Some have discarded self-examination, so far as the subject of faith is concerned, because, say they, when a man believes, he must be conscious of it, and therefore self-examination is unnecessary. Now, it is true that when a man believes a report, he is immediately conscious that he believes it, even as he is conscious that he hears, sees, and feels, otherwise he could not, like the first Christians, profess his faith, and say in sincerity, "I believe." But it ought to be remembered that consciousness respects only what is passing in the mind, and does not of itself determine its truth or falsehood. The question then is, "Of what am I conscious of believing, and how does it accord with Scripture?" A person, as I have already stated to you, may be really convinced by external and even by certain parts of internal evidence, that the Scriptures contain a revelation from God, while, by misunderstanding what the subject of this revelation is, he may be believing another Gospel. Here, therefore, there is room for self-examination. On the same principle, when a professing Christian examines his state by the Scriptures as the test of it, he of course takes it for granted that they are true. When he brings his creed to this standard, he is not inquiring if the Scriptures are divine, but whether he rightly understands the testimony of God; and when he brings his spirit and conduct to this test, he is simply examining how far they accord with what are there declared to be the natural effects of faith in its genuine import. Now, as no fruits can



be tokens of faith but such as we know to proceed from it, this latter examination ultimately resolves itself into the same thing with the former. The Jews were as conscious that they believed Moses as any can be that they believe in Christ; and they might perhaps say, as has been done by some, that they had no more authority for believing that his writings were true than they had to believe the sentiments which they ascribed to him; but say what they might, his writings were true, but the conclusions which they drew from them were false. So is it with many in relation to the Gospel. The Gospel itself is infallibly true; but what they think is the Gospel is in reality something very different indeed.

The Scriptures, accordingly, are full of warnings\* against false doctrines, and perversions of the truth, 2 Cor. xi. 13—15. Gal. i. 5—9.; iii. 1.; iv. 13—20. Phil. iii. 2. 2 John 9, 10, 11. They call upon men to bring every thing to the law and to the testimony,—to prove all things,—to try the spirits whether they are of God, to cease to hear the instruction that causeth to err,—and to hold fast that which is good, Isaiah viii. 20. 1 Thess. v. 21.; 1 John iv. 1.; Prov. xix. 21. The apostles manifest the greatest care to instruct men in what they are called to believe, 1 Cor. xv. 1—4, 11. 2 Cor. iv. 1—4. Their great object was to hold up to the view of perishing sinners “the word of the truth of the Gospel,”—to impress them with a sense of its importance and excellence,—to illustrate its nature,—and to exhibit that divine evidence by which it is fully confirmed. They urged men to believe it by every argument which reason, conscience, and revelation could suggest. The same method ought still to be employed; for men now, as well as then, may believe that to be the Gospel which is contrary to it. Often, alas! they do not seriously study it, but take their views on trust; and when they receive not the love of the truth, whether they are altogether careless about, or examine it



with a dishonest heart, they are permitted to embrace strong delusions and to believe a lie.

This may be illustrated by the case of the Jews in the days of our Lord's ministry. They believed that a deliverer was promised in the Scriptures, and firmly did they believe this; but they expected him to be a temporal Saviour, which it never was designed that he should be. Of course they did not believe what the prophets had said and meant, but a false interpretation of their language. This was not believing the truth, but a falsehood; and hence our Lord said to them, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me," John v. 46. To believe Moses was not merely to believe that he was sent of God, but to believe what was meant in his prophecies and law. The belief of what was different from or contrary to this, was not believing, but disbelieving him. Some, accordingly, are said to have believed in Christ, to whom he would not commit himself, because he knew that though his miracles had convinced them that he was the Messiah, they did not believe him to be so in the Scripture sense, John i. 23—25. The people on one occasion intended to take our Lord and make him a king, John vi. 14. They believed that a prophet was to come, and that Jesus was he; but they did not understand, and so did not believe, what was prophesied of his character and the design of his coming. Their faith, then, was the belief of a lie; for it was a persuasion that he should be an earthly prince, and a deliverer from the Roman yoke. To believe in the great Prophet, was to credit what was intended in the Scriptures which spake of him: In like manner, to believe the Gospel, is to believe what the Scriptures *mean* by it, and not merely something so called, but which is not really it.

Many delude themselves by imagining that the Gospel is but a new law, requiring only sincere though imperfect obedience. Now, the design of the Gospel is to train us up to perfect obedience by gradually delivering us from the dominion of sin, and at last perfect-



ing our likeness to God in the heavenly world. It is thus that it blesses us with perfect happiness : for true enjoyment springs from conformity to God, and is proportioned to the degree of this conformity. We are restored at once to holiness and happiness by the revelation of the divine character in the manner of our redemption through Christ. It is foolish to represent sincere obedience as peculiar to a certain class, for all men yield that degree of obedience which the heart is inclined to, and which they find convenient, Matth. xxiii. 23—26 ; and beyond this what is called sincere obedience is never carried by the very people who trust in it.

Multitudes in this country imagine that they believe the Gospel because they never directly called the divinity of it in question, but have admitted its truth through life : but the fact is, they have never seriously examined it. They have been taught from infancy that it is the word of God, and have never taken the trouble to inquire into it, because never properly impressed by it. It is with it as with ten thousand things which men may have heard, and never thought of questioning, because they felt no particular interest in them. Such things, however, they cannot be said to believe. If “ faith is the confident persuasion of the truth and certainty of the divine promises which exhibit things hoped for, and the conviction upon evidence of the reality of things not seen,” it is of course neither unfounded presumption nor absurd credulity, Heb. xi. 1. That traditional admission of the truth of revelation to which I refer, is not belief upon evidence, but is a careless assent to the general declaration that the Scriptures are divine, without the knowledge of the great truth which they testify. Many, for example, imagine they believe the Gospel when they believe that they shall be justified partly by their own works, and partly by the sacrifice of Christ. His work is thus viewed as designed to supply the deficiency of human merit ; and the benefit of it is considered as the reward of diligent exertion. It



may seem strange that such should look to the merits of the Saviour at all ; but the fact is, even they wish to retain his merits as it were in reserve, that, in case the scale of their sins should outweigh that of their fancied good qualities, they may have something additional to trust to. Now this is not believing the Gospel, which is a proclamation of free mercy to the chief of sinners, and which declares that “ no other foundation than that of the work of Christ can ever be laid,” and that “ if salvation be of grace, it is no more of work, otherwise grace is no more free favour ; and if it be of work, it is no more of grace, otherwise work is no more work,” 1 Cor. iii. 11. Rom. xi. 6. We are thus explicitly taught that we must be justified, either wholly by works of our own, or wholly by free grace through the work of Christ. The former we cannot be ; to the latter, then, we are shut up ; and if we reject this plan of acceptance, we must perish. Gal. v. 1—6. ; vi. 14.

The glory and suitableness of this truth constitute the grand evidence of its divinity, so that while these are not perceived, the Gospel is not at all understood, and cannot be believed. This is the case even with persons who can speak scripturally of the truth, if they do not live under its influence. We may not be able to express in words the exact nature of the defect which there must be in the views of such : but still there is some essential deficiency and error in their ideas which, while subsisting in their minds, must keep them from really discerning the intrinsic beauty, excellence, and glory of the Gospel. With all their verbal orthodoxy, there is some essential quality in the truth which is not properly perceived, and some error inconsistent with the faith of it retained, in consequence of which it is made to them another Gospel.

It is not enough that such characters are sincere in their profession. Sincerity is unquestionably essential to true religion ; but a man may sincerely believe error as well as truth, and may sincerely think that things are pleasing to God, which are really an abomination in



his sight, Isaiah lxvi. 3—5. 2 Thes. ii. 11. Rom. x. 2. Acts xxii. 3. Saul of Tarsus was conscientious in persecuting Christians, yet he afterwards reckoned himself a ring-leader among sinners for so doing; and our Lord told his disciples that some who killed them would think they did God service, Acts xxvi. 9. 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 Cor. xv. 9. John xvi. 2. These examples show us the high importance of having the conscience instructed and formed by the word of God, Isaiah viii. 20. Luke xi. 35. John xv. 22. 1 John iv. 1. Prov. ii. 1—5. It is true that we must act as we think right; but since we have the means of knowing the truth, it is our bounden duty and true interest to compare our views and sentiments with the word of God, under the conviction that we are very apt to think well of what we are inclined to, and that in this case the error of the conscience, instead of excusing evil, is itself criminal, John iii. 19—21. Gal. i. 14—17. Hosea iv. 6. John xv. 24.

Unbelief does not arise from mere ignorance, and is not an error of the understanding only. It springs from aversion of heart to the holy and humbling nature of the truth; and hence unbelievers are represented as hating the light, and shutting their eyes lest they should see it. Whatever qualities in the truth are perceived by them, they do not appear excellent in their eyes, but, on the contrary, call forth their dislike. Indeed, were not the Gospel in some measure known, men could not hate it nor could they disbelieve or reject it. A proper discernment of it is however inseparably connected with the belief of it, and with the love and approbation of the heart towards it. The man who is taught of God sees a beauty, a grandeur and a glory in it which charm and purify the soul. The measure known by unbelievers of that which constitutes the excellence of it, occasions to them pain, because it disturbs their peace; and the principle of dislike works secretly perhaps, but powerfully in their hearts, so as to keep them from discerning its true glory. So far are they from being excusable, that, on the contrary, it requires the most criminal exertions on



their part to shut out from them that marvellous light which shines around them in the Gospel. What they do see in it is so opposite to some one or other of their beloved principles and pursuits, that they feel unwilling to follow up their inquiries, and shut their minds to its light. Often do they speak as if the evidence of sense were necessary, and excuse themselves by affecting to lament the want of this kind of evidence, which, in matters of pure faith, it is absurd to expect. They have seen as much of the truth as convinces them, that, if they follow it, they must abandon their present course ; and feeling the uneasiness already caused by its discoveries, they strive to forget it, and endeavour to enjoy themselves in their unhallowed indulgences. 1 John iii. 20.

The perception of the evidence of holy truth must very materially depend on the state of the heart ; for were it otherwise, the same evidence presented to minds capable of understanding it, would invariably produce the same impression and conviction. In regard to matters purely intellectual, or which involve nothing connected with our interests or pursuits, the state of the heart is of little consequence ; but it is not so with declarations concerning matters that regard our affections, and the reception of which involves the abandonment of present favourite pursuits, the sacrifice of much that is dear to us, and the most important practical consequences. You will perceive, then, that though in cases in which the heart has no concern, faith will always correspond with the evidence presented, it is otherwise with a testimony concerning things which thwart our inclination ; which require a total relinquishment of a beloved system ; and which, while they are unseen and at a considerable distance, will expose us to the present reproach of the multitude by whom they are despised. It follows, therefore, that as faith does not always correspond with actual evidence, but with evidence only as it strikes the mind, there is a fearful meaning in such expressions as these : " Their eyes have they closed."



—“ They say unto God, depart from us ; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”—“ Why do ye not understand my speech ? Even because ye cannot bear my word.”—“ The ignorance that is in them because of the blindness,” or rather “ the hardness, obduracy, or callousness of their heart.” Acts xxviii. 27. Job xxi. 4. John viii. 43. Ephes. iv. 18.

There is a wide difference between natural, or physical, and moral inability. The former consists in a defect or want of capacity in a man's mind or body, by which he is rendered incapable of knowing or doing any thing, though he be ever so desirous of doing so. Natural inability, therefore, as it arises from some object *without* the will, is quite unconnected with responsibility, and so cannot be criminal. Moral inability consists in a disinclination, or opposition, of the *will itself* to any thing, so great that the mind, though acting freely—that is, choosing without any external compulsion or restraint—invariably follows the opposite. The former, morally considered, is neither good nor evil : the latter is blameable when it is a disinclination to good, and praiseworthy when it is a disinclination to evil. The brethren of Joseph, we are told, “ could not speak peaceably to him.” And why so ? Not surely because they were under a natural, that is, a physical inability, to speak kindly to him ; for no external power guided their tongues ; but entirely because they were under the government of envy and hatred, Gen. xxxvii. 4. If a dutiful and affectionate son had been waiting on Benhadad in Hazael's stead, he could not have smothered him as did Hazael, 2 Kings viii. 15. and why not ? but because of his sense of duty and his filial affection. Now the greater this moral inability to do evil is, the more excellent is that being in whom it resides ; and hence the moral glory of God who cannot lie, Titus i. 2. and cannot deny himself, 2 Tim. ii. 13. On the other hand, the greater the moral inability to do good, the more depraved, guilty, and odious, is the subject of it, Matt. xii. 34, 35. Jer. xiii. 23.



Mistakes on this subject have sometimes arisen from the sense often put on the word *cannot* in regard to it. The word is employed in two senses. It sometimes denotes that which is literally impossible, as when we say, man *cannot* overthrow the work of God, the blind *cannot* see, and we *cannot*, by taking thought, add one cubit to our stature. But it is often used to express the mere want of will or inclination. Some have eyes full of adultery, and *cannot* cease from sin. The man who had retired to rest with his family, said to his neighbour, “I *cannot* rise and give thee.” We every day hear people, when asked to do a thing which they dislike to do, say, I cannot do it; really, I cannot. Now we quite understand them to mean, that they are strongly averse, or unwilling to do the thing. And why then do we not understand the Scriptures, when, in similar language, they express the unwillingness of sinners to return to God?

These distinctions are not far-fetched, or matters of mere speculation. What man is there who, if charged with neglecting the duty of his place, could say in truth that he was unable to do it at the time, however much he was inclined to do it, would fail to adduce this fact in his defence? Now if this distinction is practically made by all when any present interest is concerned, and is never questioned but in reference to religion, is it not evident that the cause of this difference lies in the blinding influence of sin? Perfect freedom consists in a man's acting agreeably to his own inclination, without any compulsion or restraint. Freedom arising from a man's motives being in a state of equilibrium were a power to act without reason—a power, if it may be so called, certainly far from being desirable, it being only that of a madman. As a free agent, man will act agreeably to his own mind; and, of course, as divine things are in their very nature disagreeable to him, he freely chooses the contrary, because they accord with the desires of his heart. There is as great a connection between men's voluntary actions and their internal prin-



ciples, as between the nature of a tree and that of its fruit. This, however, is never in other cases held to be an excuse for what is wrong ; and why should it be so with regard to religion ? Were a thief upon his trial to assert that such was his propensity to steal, that he could not keep his hands from the goods of his neighbour—or were a murderer to affirm that such was the hatred which he bore to the deceased, that, when an opportunity offered, he could not but imbrue his hands in his blood—what judge or jury would listen to such a plea ? Both of these declarations might in certain respects be true ; but this, instead of being a reason why the parties should be acquitted, would be the strongest reason why they should be condemned. Were it otherwise, moral government would be overturned, law would be at an end, and the prince of darkness himself were least deserving of punishment. But this cannot be. Such is the enmity of the heart against God, that it cannot seek his glory ; but is not this the very ground of condemnation ? There is nothing to hinder men from believing the Gospel but their own sinful disposition. “ Their ear,” says the prophet, “ is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken.” But why ? The answer is added, “ behold the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach—they have no delight in it.” Jer. vi. 10 ; vii. 26—28. And can it for a moment be supposed that this spirit is blameless ?

Every day men believe many things as true, of which there is far less evidence than is given them of the truth of the Gospel ; and the reason is, they have no dislike to the things of this world, but hate the things that are of God, John v. 43. 1 John v. 9, 10. John viii. 47. Rom. viii. 7. There are truths also which command the faith of the mind, whether willing or unwilling : But there are truths, on the other hand, the evidence of which may be resisted by a mind full of prejudice, pride, and self-conceit, and governed by vicious propensities. Such a character does not seriously, calmly, and candidly, examine the statements laid be-



fore him ; the love of sin, and an unwillingness to follow where truth might lead him, make him wish that he may find the arguments by which they are supported unsatisfactory ; and he listens most eagerly to every objection that is made to them, and retains most firmly all that can prepossess him against them. That such persons should remain unbelievers need cause no surprise : But is it not evident that it is their own fault that they are not convinced ? For their unbelief is not owing to dulness or incapacity, but to the depravity of their heart. The Saviour has explicitly declared, that, if any man will do his will, or, in other words, is really determined to follow truth wherever it may lead him, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, John vii. 17.

The influence of faith arises from the nature of the thing believed. If we credit good news we rejoice, and if bad news we are grieved : If we believe a threatening, and are unable to avoid the impending evil, we are afraid : If we believe the promise of a trifle we are little affected, but if we credit that of an invaluable gift, we are quite elated,—we rely on him who made it, and we expect the promised good according to his word. Thus it is the nature of the thing believed, and the concern we have in it, from which the influence of faith springs. There is an exact correspondence between the former and the latter of these, whatever be the object of belief.

If, then, it is the nature of the thing believed which affects us, faith must be a belief of the character and qualities, as well as the existence and truth of its object. The faith of the Gospel is not merely a belief that Jesus died, but that he died for sin, and that he hath made atonement for it ;—not only that he rose from the dead, but that he did so in a public character, on account of the justification of the ungodly, and as a token of the perfection of his sacrifice,—not only that he suffered on earth and is now blessed in heaven, but a belief of the character of God as thus exhibited, and



the manifestation of which is the glory of the Gospel. When thus understood, the plan of salvation is perceived to be every way worthy of God, full of his excellence, and highly illustrative of all his perfections. It is also perceived to be in all respects suited to the state and the wants of sinners, and divinely rich and free in the bestowment of salvation. If the Gospel is not discerned in this light, then it is not believed to be what it really is.

All the glory and excellency of the Gospel is in itself, and therefore ought not to be distinguished from it. The truth, then, cannot be said to be believed unless its glory and importance be so. It is as *truths* or realities that the doctrines of the Gospel are the objects of faith, but the belief of them includes a belief of their qualities or properties. The Gospel is not only a true saying, but a saying divinely excellent in itself, and supremely interesting to us; and if it is not perceived in this light, then it is not believed to be what it is. In other words, the truth is not believed. The faith of the Gospel is not merely the belief of certain facts, but also, and chiefly, of the import of these facts. The Jewish rulers believed a bare fact, when they were persuaded that Jesus had risen from the dead, while they did not believe the truths which are connected with and arise out of that fact. Though faith be the belief of the testimony of a credible witness, it is very wrong to say that the faith of the Gospel is a belief of the bare facts only of which it testifies, apart from their import. The difference between believers and others lies in the different apprehensions which they have of the same object. In the eyes of the one, the Gospel in its true nature appears to be foolishness; in the eyes of the other it appears to be full of heavenly wisdom and glory. The reason why the former deems it foolishness, is that he is governed by sin, while the latter is brought by divine teaching to have a just apprehension of the character of God as revealed in Christ. That system with which the carnal mind is delighted cannot be the truth in its



genuine purity and excellence, but a system congenial with some or other of the evil principles of the heart, 1 Cor. ii. 14. To such a mind the glory of the truth does not appear, and error is embraced in its stead. The faith of the Gospel is of course a conviction of its truth, arising from a spiritual discernment of such a glory, wisdom, and excellence in it as satisfies the mind that a scheme at once so glorious in itself, and so adapted to the relations both of God and man, could have none but Jehovah for its author, 2 Cor. iv. 6. Prov. xxii. 19—21.

The degree of our faith, then, will be in proportion to the degree in which the truth is thus perceived by us. Our faith rests on the import of the Gospel itself as the great evidence of its divinity, and of course flows from the knowledge of it, John iv. 45. Phil. iii. 7, 8. Acts xxvi. 18. John iv. 41, 42. Hence we read of the full assurance of understanding, and hence too knowledge and faith are used to express the same idea, Ps. lxxxix. 14, 15. Isa. liii. 11. It may be said, that as a man must either believe or disbelieve a report, there can be no degrees of faith. But let it be remembered, that though even at first, the Gospel is believed in as far as it is discerned, yet as it is often very imperfectly understood, the faith of it is but weak, so that it is only when the individual's views of it are enlarged, that his faith acquires maturity, inasmuch as it not only then embraces more of the truth, and thus increases in extent, but also because every new discovery, which is made of any of its parts, throws greater light on those which are already known, and on the glorious connection and harmony of the whole, so that faith grows more intense, not merely in regard to the discoveries newly vouchsafed, but also in regard to those which were previously possessed.

If any one put the question—Am I a believer? let him be asked, not in what manner, but what *thing* he has believed: and let him also be directed to the fruits of the Spirit as described in Scripture. If a man say he



has faith, and has not works, the Scriptures do not for a moment argue the matter with him, whether his faith has or wants this or the other ingredient, but they at once pronounce it dead, or a mere profession, and not a reality, James ii. 26. We are in the habit of saying a dead man, though the body is only destitute of life, because we see only the body : in like manner, a profession of faith, unaccompanied with the power of godliness, is called a dead faith, because we know the existence of faith only by a *consistent* profession of it. We in like manner read of loving in word and in tongue, as distinguished from loving in deed and truth ; but we never infer from this that the former is really love, but of a different nature from the latter. We consider the former as a mere profession, or a nonentity, and not as a reality. Compare James ii. 15, 16. with 1 John iii. 17, 18. and James ii. 26.

I do not mean that, where the gospel is believed, the truth will in every individual produce exactly the same effects in every respect. To persons of different abilities, of different dispositions, and in different circumstances, the same truths will appear in somewhat different lights. Take a number of persons, some of whom are quick and others slow of understanding,—some naturally distinguished by warmth of feeling and ardour of affection, and others naturally cold and stoical,—some very timid, and others almost strangers to fear,—some constitutionally inclined to melancholy, and others who have a constant flow of high spirits, and you will find that the same things will affect them differently, even when all of them receive the truth. Different degrees of faith will therefore be found among Christians, and shades of difference too in its result, even where it may be said to be equally strong. Still greater varieties will be found in the effects where there are different degrees of faith, and hence the strong are called to bear with the weak, and to imitate the kindness of the great and good Shepherd who guides his flock with the utmost tenderness and care, and with



a wise and affectionate regard to their strength, and the nature of their circumstances.

The belief of the gospel is necessarily connected with *trust* in the work of the Saviour, Ephes. i. 12, 13. Psal. ix. 10. This arises from the nature of the thing believed, which is good news respecting the work and character of Christ, and includes promises the most interesting to us. The belief of bad news cannot produce trust, and neither can a report in which we have no interest. David believed that Absalom was dead, but he could not be said to trust that he was so. Jacob, on the other hand, when he believed the declaration that Joseph was alive and in prosperity, also trusted in it, and left all behind him on the ground of it, 2 Sam. xviii. 23. Gen. xlv. 27, 28. A belief in the hateful character of another will not produce trust, but a belief in the excellence of his character will. Bad news will, according to their nature, produce, when believed, grief, fear, or aversion; good news alone will cause joy, confidence, and love.

Now, so glorious, suitable, and interesting are the declarations and blessings of the Gospel,—such is the character of God there unfolded,—and such the glory of the Saviour's work of which it testifies, that the belief of it must be accompanied with the relinquishment of every false ground of confidence, and with trust in the atonement for the present and final blessedness of the soul, Heb. vi. 18. 1 Pet. ii. 4—6. Persuaded of the truth that salvation is to be had through Christ, the sinner comes to him, or trusts the salvation of his soul in his hands, Jer. iii. 22, 23. John vi. 68. Isa. lv. 5. The one perfect offering of the Son of God thus becomes the sole ground on which the mind rests its hope of mercy. "Behold," says God, "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone: He that believeth shall not make haste," Isa. xxviii. 16. Believing in Christ; he is as it were bonded into Him the living rock, and is a partaker of his life and his stability. And being treated as one with the



• Saviour, the work of the surety is reckoned to him as though it were his own, Rom. vi. 1—14. In proportion then to the strength of his faith will be his feeling of security. If a man dreads that that on which he is standing is about to give way, he is in haste to be gone. The agitation of his mind excites him to flee. Thus the people of Israel felt when the earth opened to swallow up Dathan and Abiram, Numb. xvi. 34. But he who believes in the atonement of Christ will trust in it with unsuspecting confidence. Never shall he find the ground on which he rests crumbling beneath his feet. While he holds fast the testimony of God he shall not feel the trembling agitation of that man's mind who is resting his eternity on any thing short of the perfect work of the Redeemer. Pitiable, indeed, is the state of the sinner who, even on the confines of the grave, is brought to the inquiry, "Have I done enough to procure for me the favour of God?" Blessed truly is the Christian who, believing in the atonement of Christ, is freed from the torment of a misgiving conscience by scriptural confidence in God as just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. In a word, could a sinner believe in Jesus, and yet deem his salvation a trifling affair, he would not go to him for it; but the promise to faith supposes that this cannot be. It supposes that the man who believes the Gospel sees its unutterable importance, and the indispensable necessity, as well as the full freeness of that salvation which it is its glory to exhibit, and that he will be led to renounce all self-dependence, and to rest all his hope on the atonement. And being thus joined to the Saviour, as the superstructure is to the foundation on which it rests, he is treated as one with him in law, inasmuch as he obtains the benefits of his work, as though he had done it himself. And hence we read that there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, Rom. viii. 1.

Exhortations to believe in Christ, and to trust in him, are accordingly given indiscriminately in Scripture. The attention is not there fixed on truth in the



abstract. If a promise has been made us, we may either say we believe it, or that we trust it will be fulfilled. These two expressions convey the same idea. The former, strictly speaking, may be said to respect the promise, and the latter the person who makes it. Abraham had confidence in God that he would give him the promised seed and inheritance; and the Israelites that he would conduct them in safety through the Red Sea, Rom. iv. 18—21. Heb. xi. 8—10.; xi. 29. On the same principle, when we believe that Jesus is able and ready to save us, we must trust in him, 2 Tim. i. 12. The latter exercise is, strictly speaking, the effect of the former; but such logical precision is not used in Scripture. The two are so connected, that the one is put for the other. We have access to God with confidence by the faith of Christ, Ephes. iii. 12. When the sinner is led to the Saviour, his mind is not engaged in speculating on its own operations, so that the whole will appear to be one exercise. Though he is believing the truth, and committing himself to his Lord, he is not thinking of these as exercises of his, an employment which is generally useless, and often injurious. Such discussions are superseded by the attractive and completely absorbing object of his faith and confidence. He does not dwell with self-complacency on the idea that now he is doing his duty,—at least in the way of believing and coming to Christ; and that as he is doing so in a right manner, he may now expect the divine favour: But he is so engaged with the manifestation of the divine character in the salvation of sinners through the atonement, that he thinks of himself only as an ungodly sinner, and of that glorious Deliverer who graciously invites him to come to him for rest. At the same time it ought to be remembered, that when he finds the truth purifying his heart, he is increasingly sensible that he has indeed embraced the genuine Gospel of Christ.

The belief of the Gospel is connected with an application of its interesting statements to our own pai-



ticular case. "The entire truth is allowed to enter into the mind, and the believer says—All this relates to me." The discoveries of revelation are seen and felt to be realities. When we hear of another being in the jaws of death, we may feel little interest in the matter, and may talk of it with indifference; but if placed in his situation, cold speculation would give place to heart-felt interest. Did we hear that the plague was raging in the opposite hemisphere, we might feel but little affected; but were we told that it had entered our own house, we should at once feel deeply interested. The matter would then be brought home to ourselves. Now God does not tell us of another class of beings or of another world which is under his curse, but that this is the case with our world, and with ourselves individually. We are thus made to feel when his testimony is believed that we are ourselves sinners ready to perish, and that to us is the mercy of God proclaimed through the sacrifice of his beloved Son. Witness the instances of the woman of Samaria, John iv. 28, 29. the Philip-  
 pian jailor, Acts xvi. 29, 30. and of the Thessalonians, 1 Thes. i. 5. Such characters are "convinced of all, and judged of all: the secrets of their hearts are made manifest;" and the divinity of the truth is felt, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. Whatever part of divine truth does not affect us is not believed by us, for we are interested in the whole. When the unutterably important statements of the Bible are brought home to ourselves, we reap the benefits of its rich treasures as much as if it had been written exclusively for us. This appropriation of the truth of God necessarily attracts the heart to it, and excludes from our thoughts all interfering subjects. It follows, that he who refuses to risk his character or interest in the world for the sake of it, does not really believe it. Such is the nature of the Gospel, that he who is taught its true glory must be convinced that it is the basis of confidence and ~~hope~~ of courage and of joy. Where it is not seen in this light, it is



not believed, whatever may be the confession of the mouth.

It is not enough that a man believes that Jesus is in some sense a Saviour. He must believe that he is a Saviour in the Scripture sense of the appellation. Now, if the sense in which he understands him to be a Saviour does not furnish him with a ground of confidence before God, his view of his character must be false and defective, or, in other words, it does not correspond with what is testified concerning Him. We accordingly find that the hearers of the Gospel who, in the parable of the sower, are represented by the good ground, have their faith distinguished as an understanding of the word, Matth. xiii. 23. The stony-ground hearers were not hypocrites, for they had at one time joy in listening to the Gospel, which must have arisen from something they believed. They were self-deceived, for in this something they rested as the real meaning of the divine testimony; which it was not, and so lulled themselves into false security. The nature of the error of such persons it may be impossible precisely to express in words, but it must consist in some self-righteous dependence. Though in words they admit all that is testified of Christ, there is undoubtedly some error held by them which is inconsistent with, and subversive of the real import of the Gospel: Thus the Corinthians, who professed to believe in the resurrection of Christ, are represented as overturning that fact by denying its import in denying the resurrection of his people, 1 Cor. xv. 11—19. Similar is the case with those of whom I now speak.

What should we think of a person who, while he spoke loudly and strongly of the integrity and resources of another, would not trust him with the least part of his property; or who, while he boasted of the wisdom and prudence of a friend, would not trust him with the management of the smallest concern? Surely we could not for a moment suppose that he believed what he said;



and can we imagine that he who trusts not in the Saviour is really a believer of the Gospel because he *says* he believes it. He who does not trust in the Redeemer surely does not believe in the perfection of his atonement, nor in the freeness of divine grace, and must be looking for something more to encourage him to put his confidence in him.

Were a person, on seeing a river one unbroken sheet of ice, to declare that he believed it might be crossed, and did he, when brought to the test, refuse to venture on it, even though he would by this means shorten his journey, or obtain some considerable advantage, it would be manifest that what he had expressed was not really the conviction, but the careless speculation of his mind. He had not given the matter that attention which was requisite to his forming an opinion of it; though, while there was nothing to excite his interest in it, he could easily persuade himself that he believed the river might be ventured on. The case, however, was very different when his expressed opinion was to be acted on.

In like manner the Gospel is, with many, a matter of mere speculation; it is not seen to be a reality, and of course is not believed, and cannot be confided in. In this state of mind the transforming power of the Gospel, which ever accompanies the belief of it, is not felt, and neither safety nor purity can be attained by it. Though in words the freeness of divine grace is allowed, it is not really perceived.—Something else than the unfettered invitations of the Saviour is deemed necessary to warrant a confident approach to him. Faith is sometimes considered as this something.—It is viewed as some mysterious principle, the nature of which cannot be defined, but which is quite different from the belief of the Gospel. When this principle is supposed to be obtained, the hopes of the man are high, and great joy is expressed. But when examined, it is found that this joy does not spring from a conviction that the genuine Gospel of Christ is true, for such do not expect



any comfort from that.—They imagine that of the truth of the Gospel they never had a doubt, because they have received it as a tradition from their fathers. The fact is, that the ground of their joy is not in the testimony of God, but in themselves. How different is this from the doctrine of Scripture, which represents peace and joy as the result of believing the truth, Rom: xv. 13. 1 Pet. i. 8. What, then, can be more evident, than that where such notions predominate, the free invitations of the Gospel are not understood, and cannot be accepted?

Were a feast freely provided for a body of people who were perishing with hunger, and proclamation to be made to them indiscriminately, saying, “Whosoever will, let him come and partake of the feast freely.” would not every one who believed this instantly accept of the invitation? He would see that he was described by his necessities, and that no more particular invitation was requisite to warrant him to go and partake of what had been generously provided. Should any one of this body of people lay hold of the word *will*, in the proclamation, and say, since the language of it is, “whosoever *will*,” I must first inquire if I am truly willing before I can be entitled to go, it would be evident that he did not believe that the invitation was to all, but to a select number, distinguished by a particular disposition. The consequence would be, that the invitation, describing the whole as perishing with hunger, and not by any other descriptive name, would be rejected. They again who believed the proclamation as it stood would trust in the kindness of the generous benefactor who had made it, and in this confidence would go to him for relief. It is true, that if unwilling to go, a person would not go; but it is equally true, that his willingness, though necessary to his going, would be no part of the warrant of any one of this body to go. A mistake as to this has been the cause of much perplexity and sin in relation to the Gospel feast. This, like every other similitude, halts at a certain point, for



bodily food is not immediately enjoyed when the report concerning it is believed. But no sooner is the Gospel believed to be a true saying, than it is seen to be worthy of all acceptation, so that the person who believes it immediately enters on the enjoyment of the precious blessing, inasmuch as he cannot fail to acquiesce in a plan of salvation, which thus commends itself at once to his conscience and his heart, and to take the enjoyment of the peace and the consolation which the message is so fitted to impart. And what is this but taking of the water of life freely, or, in other words, accepting the boon which the Gospel declares to be the gift of God to all who will receive it? There is no room then for supposing that besides believing there is required an effort as it were, to excite the mind to a particular state of feeling, in order to a cordial acceptance of the gift of God, for if at the very moment that the Gospel is seen to be true, it is also seen to be worthy of all acceptation; it follows that in the very exercise of believing, the individual, to use the language of Scripture, submits himself unto the righteousness of God, and so places his confidence in the Saviour, on the ground of the evidence presented in the Gospel itself. Thus Abraham and the other Patriarchs, in the very instant that they were persuaded of the truth of the promises, embraced them, Heb. xi. 13.

Many an anxious inquirer has felt as if the great difficulty were to believe that Christ is willing to receive *him*. Such a difficulty is met by the wondrous fact, that he assumed our nature, and subjected himself to all the many and varied kinds of evils into which we had plunged ourselves, and bore that curse to which we were liable, for the express purpose that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but might have everlasting life, John iii. 14, 15. He accordingly, invites every sinner of every description to come to him that he may obtain the benefit of his work, Matt. xi. 28. John vii. 37. Prov. ix. 1, 5.

Never question his willingness to receive you at once



just as you are :—He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins. Go to him then, that you may obtain forgiveness—that you may be freed from the fetters of sin—that you may be transformed into his likeness, and may have all your wants abundantly supplied. Ponder his exhortation to the Laodiceans and you will be convinced that all his blessings are to be had without money and without price, Isa. iv. 1—3. Rev. iii. 18. You will thus be led to go to him in the confidence that he is able and willing to receive, and to bless you, whatever your circumstances may be.

So long as the truth is not understood and believed, it will not be confided in, but as soon as believed it will become the object of trust. In Scripture, accordingly, faith is considered as having its immediate issue in coming to Christ; and hence is treated as the same thing. A knowledge of the unlimited bounty of Heaven, and of Jesus as the dispenser of this bounty, is necessarily followed by an application to him. John iv. 10. In coming to Christ we rest our eternity on him as the foundation which has been laid in Zion, in opposition to all other grounds of confidence. This calms the mind, and inspires it with the purest principles of obedience. Having committed all to the Redeemer, we go forward in the firm persuasion that our all is safe.

Keep then your heart fixed on the great object of faith, that you may be carried beyond perplexing questions concerning your own exercises, by the transforming glory of the Gospel. \* May you experience much of that peace which passeth understanding, and which keeps the heart and mind through Christ Jesus. I am, &c.



## LETTER XX.

## ON THE GRACIOUS AND CONSOLATORY NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.

The nature of Divine Grace—Mistakes in regard to it—No preparatory work necessary to qualify for it—The Invitations of the Gospel are addressed to all—Remarks on the history of the brazen serpent—Some improper prayers noticed—Remarks on Isa. lv.—Mistakes in regard to the object of Faith—The means by which Faith is produced—Improper inference drawn from the necessity of it in order to salvation.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my last letter I called your attention to faith as the medium through which we are justified in the sight of God ; allow me now to direct your thoughts to the gracious and consolatory nature of the Gospel.

The name given to the message of reconciliation is expressive of its joyful import :—it is emphatically termed the Gospel, that is, the Good News. The heaven-taught sinner, when, on looking to his past career, he finds that nothing but matter of anguish and alarm meets him, can find rest in nothing but in the delightful declaration, that there is a propitiation with God, that he may be feared. Ps. cxxx. 3, 4. It gladdens his heart to know that the blessing of forgiveness is the gift of Heaven through faith in the atonement. He hears the gracious call of the Redeemer to come to him, and that call he obeys. At first, indeed, he may have his fears as well as his joys, in consequence of the obscurity of his views, and the feebleness of his faith ; but as he advances, his way becomes clearer, and his confidence greater. There is no need for hesitation in coming to Christ at the beginning of our course any more than at the end of it. At no time is there ground for the suspicion expressed in such language as this, ‘ If I perish, I will perish at his feet,’ as if all the con-



fidence we are warranted to maintain were like that of the lepers at the gate of Samaria, or that of Esther, when, in the face of an interdict, she ventured into the presence of Ahasuerus with supplications for her people. 2 Kings vii. 3—4. Esther iv. 16. It is highly improper to compare the bare probability of escape from famine on the one hand, or from enemies on the other, with the certain security of him who flees to the hope set before him. How derogatory to the character of the God of mercy to compare the trembling expectation founded on the possibility of a fit of capricious kindness seizing an eastern despot, with the peace in which the heart may repose when it rests on the gracious assurances of the Gospel!

You will observe that I have repeatedly used the term *warrant*, in relation to coming to Christ; and in regard to this I shall now say a few words:—In strict language, a warrant means an authority or right to do a thing, but the Gospel does much more than authorize a sinner to come to the Saviour. It commands, entreats, and beseeches every one who hears it to come to him, and threatens condemnation on every soul that will not come to him “for life.” All I mean by the expression is, the reason or ground which a sinner has to expect mercy and eternal life in coming to Him. I have applied it to *coming* to Christ only, and not to Faith, of which coming to him is strictly the effect. In regard to Faith I would remark, that the evidence of a report’s being true is the only thing that can warrant a man to believe it. The Gospel is true whether we believe it or not; and the evidence of its truth is that which warrants us to believe it, or in other words, it is the ground on which we credit it. I mention these things to you from a conviction that the term warrant is liable to be misapprehended, and that it has often been very improperly employed. Since the knowledge of the Saviour, by whom redemption is obtained, and of the grace by which it is bestowed, can only be had by means of the testimony of God, it is easy



to see how the actual enjoyment of salvation comes by faith in that testimony.

I need not say, then, that this method of justification is illustrative of the exceeding riches of the grace of God. Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9. Much, however, is often said of this grace, while, in fact, it is viewed rather as a piece of justice than a display of unmerited favour. Numbers speak as if, in case God had not extended mercy to man, we had been hardly dealt with. This is to deny his grace altogether; for if the demands of the law are not equitable, there can be no justice in the sentence of condemnation, and to call relief from such a sentence by the name of grace, were to add insult to injury. Far from this is the character of God. In the plan of mercy through Christ, the richest blessings are bestowed on the guilty and unworthy. To deny the grace of God we must lower the standard of duty; and to derogate from the perfection of that standard is to lessen the necessity, and of course the glory of divine mercy. Often do men overlook the justice of their condemnation, and forget that God is infinitely wise in all his procedure, and hence speak as if his grace were nearly allied to caprice. This leads to the abuse of it, and has frequently exposed it to reproach.

Mistaken views of it are at the bottom of the complaints of those who say they are willing to receive salvation from Christ, yea that they are anxious to receive it, and who virtually complain of him as unwilling to bestow it. The fact is, they are not willing to receive it as poor helpless sinners, and as a matter of pure favour. They are averse to the humbling doctrines of the cross, being too proud to live on mere alms, and are wishing for something in or about themselves as a ground of confidence before God. If willing to receive it in His way, there is nothing that can exclude them from it. Jesus came to save sinners, even the chief of sinners, 1 Tim. i. 15. He invites every one to come to him, and promises that whosoever cometh he will in no wise cast out, Matt. xi. 28. John vi. 37. He says,



whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely, Rev. xxii. 17. The Gospel feast is prepared, and all are invited, yea even besought to partake of it.

It often happens that when these precious truths are stated, the reply is, "I am waiting for a day of power." Now, though our depravity renders the exertion of divine power necessary to the renovation of our minds, it is and always was our duty to give the whole heart to God. How foolish, then, is it in any to call a mere form of religion by the name of waiting at the pool for a day of power! Of the whole period of Christ's administration in his exalted state, it may be said that it is the day of his power, as distinguished from the period of his humiliation. In regard to each individual, the day on which he first believed may be called the day on which divine power renovated his heart: but of the present moment it may be said to every sinner, "Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation." If any one is waiting for some imaginary time when God will be more willing to justify him through Christ than he is at present, he will find himself greatly mistaken. The reason of his condemnation, if he continue in unbelief, will be, that he would not come to the Saviour for life, but persisted in wishing that God would work in him something in which he might glory as the ground of his acceptance. Since in regard to each individual the day of salvation is limited to his life, every one is called and entreated to come to the Saviour *now*, in the confidence that in Him God is well pleased, and ready to receive all who come to him.

The Saviour has been lifted up on the cross as the serpent of brass was upon the pole; and as the stung Israelites were called to look to the latter in the confidence of being cured, so the language of Christ is, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth," John iii. 14, 15. Num. xxi. 6—9. Isa. xlv. 22. Now, what would have been your feelings had you seen the brazen serpent elevated on the pole, had



you known its healing virtue in numerous cases, and yet had seen a wretched Israelite, poisoned in his vitals, and mourning in excruciating torture, turning his eyes from the only object that could restore his health, applying to this and the other physician, and using this and the other medicine, in the vain hope of curing his disorder? Would you not have at once pitied his folly, and have felt indignant at his impiety. What better had been his case if he had said that he did not expect a *complete* cure of his malady by the means he was using, but only wished that he might get it abated, and be brought to a state of convalescence before he could think of looking to the serpent of brass for its total removal? If the disease could thus far be conquered without looking as commanded, why might it not be perfectly removed, and of what use, then, were the brazen serpent at all, and what wisdom or goodness were there in the appointment of it?

But when, on the other hand, a stung Israelite abandoned all hope of being cured, or even having his disorder lessened by any human means whatsoever, and turned his languid eye to the serpent of brass, in the confidence of being relieved, and found his malady removed, how much would this honour God, and how much would it gratify every benevolent heart! And is it not far more gratifying to see a sinner abandoning the vain hope of deliverance by deeds of his own, or even of having his maladies partially removed by preparatory means, and looking simply to the cross at once for pardon and for purity? The heavenly Physician is able and ready to cure all who come to Him. They need not endeavour to be somewhat better before they come to him, for he can cure them as they are.

This blessed truth was preached by the apostles to all indiscriminately, and every one was called to receive it guilty as he stood. It is matter of deep regret when it is obscured by laboured descriptions of certain previous holy dispositions as necessary in those who would come to the Saviour. The Gospel itself is thus treated as in-



capable of profiting any but those who are so qualified ; and to attain these pre-requisites becomes the painful struggle of many sincere inquirers. They are busy in endeavouring to feel in a particular way, and to act in a particular manner, in order to prepare themselves for believing the Gospel. They pray often and fervently that God would enable them to reach the great object of their desire ; which is just praying that God would enable them to do something which may be to them a ground of acceptance before him. Is not this to ask that something may be wrought in them to procure the divine favour, instead of looking to that work which the Saviour hath already finished as the sole foundation of peace with God ? Is it not to ask salvation in a way which supersedes the necessity of that work ? Yet such is the spirit of the prayers of many, even when praying to be enabled to believe in Christ ; for what they mean by faith in him is some work to be performed, on the ground of which they expect acceptance, or, which comes to the same thing, they hope to be rewarded by the benefit of the righteousness of Christ.

It is a striking proof of the self-righteous pride of the heart, that the most unfettered proclamations of mercy are made to bend to its purposes ; as, for example, the following delightful invitation of Heaven, " Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters : and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price," Isa. lv. 1, 2, 3.

This thirst is not a holy thirst after spiritual blessings ; for the persons addressed are represented as " spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not," and likewise as disinclined to listen to the voice of God ; which cannot be the character of those whose hearts have in any measure been renewed. Yet many have been deprived of the relief and happiness which this free proclamation of divine mercy and goodness is fitted to impart, in consequence of looking into themselves in the first instance,



and striving to find or to attain a holy disposition of heart before coming to Christ. They have mourned the want of a spiritual thirst for the sacred blessings of the Gospel, because they deemed this necessary to entitle them to acceptance; and have thus perverted to a self-righteous purpose the very words of mercy and of grace. It ought never to be forgotten that it is not of that hungering and thirsting after righteousness of which our Lord speaks, in his sermon on the Mount (Matth. v. 6.) that the prophet is here speaking, but of that natural thirst after happiness which is common to all men. This desire of happiness is *in itself* no part of our depravity, for it is essential to the constitution of every rational being; and even when it is most sinfully directed—when it seeks gratification in the most wicked and impious pursuits, or vents itself in the most ungodly opposition to the providence and will of Heaven, yet, as it is connected with wretchedness, it is kindly met in this unrestricted proclamation of mercy. Whatever be the cause of unhappiness,—whether it proceed from the losses and afflictions so common in life, from disappointed pride, the misery attendant on the way of rebellion, remorse of conscience, the prevalence of the worst and most hateful of passions, or the torment attendant on self-righteous courses,—in a word, proceed from what it may, this proclamation of the Gospel is addressed to its unhappy victims, and graciously calls them to turn from their vain and wretched pursuits, and invites them to partake of true, substantial, and permanent blessedness. It says, “hear, and you shall be happy.”—that is, believe the Gospel of peace, and ye shall experience that true enjoyment which is suited to your faculties, which will completely fill them, and which will free you from all your restless and tormenting desires. It is not, therefore, merely of convinced, or, as they are often called, sensible sinners, that the prophet speaks, but of all the family of Adam, who are universally subject more or less to the pain consequent on unsatisfied desires. They have all departed from God, the only spring of genuine hap-



piness, and never can they be happy till they return to him. Though they feel themselves wretched, or at least unsatisfied, they know not the cause ; and even when told it, they are naturally unwilling to allow it to be what it is, and obstinately cleave to the broken cisterns which have so often disappointed them. With much long-suffering, however, the Lord continues in this and in many other proclamations of love kindly to call on them to leave the polluted waters after which they are in quest, and to come to the pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, Rev. xxii. 1, 17.

Many, my dear friend, put away from themselves the consolations of the Gospel, from the notion that they must first believe that they are believers, and then only come to Christ for pardon, as a blessing to which they are entitled. But the fact that they are believers is not the object of faith. Forgetful of this, however, they begin, not with believing the testimony of God, but with ransacking their hearts for some evidence that they are in a state of salvation ; and if they fancy that they have found some marks of this kind, they will professedly thank God that they are not like others, and sit down at ease, vainly supposing that this confidence is the faith of the Gospel. How preposterous to look for evidences of faith before going at once to the cross of Christ, and resting their all upon it ! It is self-evident, that in the order of nature a person must believe the testimony of God before he can be a Christian, and therefore, a persuasion that he is a believer cannot be necessary to his being one, for that would imply a gross contradiction. It would be to suppose, that a person's believing himself to be a Christian is prior in the order of nature to his being such. This notion is allied to the perplexing statement, that the first thing which a sinner is called to believe is, that the salvation of Christ is already his in particular. How different is this from the call to believe the declaration of God, that the atonement is finish-



ed, and is all-sufficient to cleanse from his guilt every son of Adam who puts his confidence in it.

Nothing can be more evident than that whatever God calls us to believe must be already true, and therefore true whether we believe it or not ; and that, before we can believe it, evidence of its truth must be given us. But it is not true that a man is a Christian till he believe the divine testimony ; and therefore his believing that he is a Christian, or, in other words, that he is a believer, can be no part of the faith of the Gospel. The Gospel itself is absolutely true ; that is, it is true independently of our faith in it, but that a particular individual is a Christian, depends on the reception he has given to the testimony of God. Our persuasion or conviction of the fact that we are Christians, is not properly faith at all, because not revealed,—It is rather a knowledge of this fact, arising from our own immediate perception, or consciousness which springs from the nature of the impressions made upon us by the general declaration of the Gospel, and not from any thing like a direct testimony from Heaven, respecting us in particular. When this conviction is well-founded, it is the fruit of faith, and not faith itself.

The term belief, indeed, is sometimes used to denote the conviction which arises from sight, or from the testimony of sense in general, but this is only when our language is accommodated to the subject of conviction *as such*, without regard to its cause. The proper import of it is, faith in a report ; and hence it is called, “ the confidence of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen,” Heb. xi. 1. Things which we know by nature, by unassisted reason, or by experience, are not the proper objects of faith, but simply of knowledge. It is easy to see, then, that our conviction of being believers is not faith, because it is not grounded on the direct testimony of God, but arises from that immediate perception, or consciousness, in our own minds, which springs from the nature of the impression made upon us by the means of the truth believed.



I am far from meaning that a certain time must elapse before a person can be sensible that he is a believer ; for all who believe a report must be instantly sensible of it in proportion to the strength of their belief, so that this conviction may be so immediate as to be without any discernible process, even as the sight of an object is attended with the consciousness of seeing it. The impression of surrounding objects on the opened eyes of the blind man made him instantly sensible that he saw, so that he could say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see," John ix. 25. A man, when under the influence of terror, is conscious of fear, yet his mind is so taken up with the cause of his alarm that he cannot make the passion of fear an object of reflection. Now the case is similar when any important truth, and particularly the Gospel, occupies the heart. —We then think of the object of faith, and not of faith itself.

The understanding of the Gospel gives an assurance of its truth, and all who believe it must, in their very believing it, have a degree of hope concerning their own salvation, for faith is the confidence of things hoped for. The full assurance of understanding is attained by that progressive acquaintance with the truth, which is gained by obeying what we already know of it, and is connected with the full assurance of faith, that is, a complete and unwavering conviction of the truth of the Gospel ; and this again, is connected with such effects as produce the full assurance of hope, or, in other words, the firm assurance that we individually shall certainly obtain the whole of the blessings promised in the everlasting covenant, Col. ii. 2. Heb. x. 22. ; vi. 11. As faith is founded on evidence, it must be proportioned to the degree of that spiritual understanding by which it is discerned. And since there are degrees of spiritual understanding, there must be corresponding degrees of faith and ; degrees of faith suppose corresponding degrees of the assurance of hope, for the measure of the latter keeps pace with that of the former. Were a person to affirm that



he was sensible that he was a believer of the Gospel, but that, notwithstanding of this, he had no hope of salvation, this were certainly to contradict the promise connected with the divine testimony, and in certain respects to contradict himself: But if an unfruitful professor of religion were told, that he must either have received for the Gospel something different from it, or have forgotten what he once received, 2 Pet. i. 9. as otherwise he must have been the subject of its salutary influence; and were he so far convinced of this as to be led to doubt whether he indeed believed the truth, this were in no wise to call in question the divine testimony, because God hath no where testified that he in particular is a believer.

Beware, my dear friend, of concluding from these statements that the Gospel must be a very uncertain scheme for obtaining peace and hope toward God, since many are at a loss to know if that which they believe is indeed its genuine import. Consider, that if the works of creation manifest that they are the workmanship of God, the Gospel in like manner commends itself to the mind by its own light. If we can distinguish the writings of one man from those of another, is it not to be expected that there shall be such an impress of God upon his word as that all who are open to conviction shall be able to distinguish its import from the false and erroneous systems of men? When we find him saying, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" "is not my word like as a fire and a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" is it not evidently taught that there is a light and an energy in the truth of his word, which distinguishes it from the falsehoods of the votaries of error? Jer. xxiii. 28, 29. It exhibits in perfection the character of God: and while it enforces and confirms the voice of his law, it reveals to us a way of access into his presence and family which is altogether worthy of him. The healing remedy which it provides for the wounded spirit fully answers every claim and demand of God in the conscience: The mind, therefore, is not left in per-



plexity, or if any thing of this kind is felt, it must be owing to the influence of some human system obscuring the glory of the truth. Where the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as displayed in the Redeemer, shines in the heart, we see the difference between it and the uncertain guesses of men, and we rest satisfied, 1 John ii. 26, 27. We thus obtain a preservative from the errors of the wicked, and experience that rest of mind which follows the cessation of scepticism, and the confidence of faith.

Do you ask, what should be said to a person who fears that he has not believed the Gospel, and is anxious for instructions on the subject? I would say in reply, that as the faith of the Gospel is to be expected only by an attentive consideration of its nature, import, and evidence, a full statement of these should be given, and the individual referred to the Scriptures. If at all sensible of guilt and of danger, will not the importance of the subject commend to the mind the necessity of examining the divine record itself? You remember what is said of certain characters in Scripture, "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so: Therefore many of them believed," Acts xvii. 11, 12.

Men are accordingly called to hearken and pay attention to the word of God, Acts ii. 14. ; vii. 2. ; xiii. 16. They are called to stop in their mad career, and to consider their ways—to ponder the nature and issue of their present course—to ask for the old paths and the good way, that is, for the way in which, according to the Scriptures, the people of God have always walked, and you know that all of them have lived and died in the faith of Christ: In this way men are required to walk, and in so doing they are promised rest, Jer. vi. 16. The meaning of this address is explained by our Lord, when he says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matthew xi. 28.

In quickening a dead body, God uses no means but



his own immediate power, but in quickening the soul, which, though dead in trespasses and sins, possesses an understanding to distinguish between good and evil, a conscience to approve the one and condemn the other, and affections which may be wrought upon by rational motives, he employs means which possess an admirable moral fitness to produce the effect. In the former case means are out of the question, because there could be no suitableness between them and the end; but there is an aptitude in the divine evidence which accompanies, and is contained in the Gospel, to produce faith in it. When truth of the greatest importance, and accompanied with the highest evidence, is placed before the mind,—even evidence, greater and stronger than that which men proceed upon daily and hourly in all the concerns of life,—must it not be owing to wilful blindness if the testimony of Heaven is disbelieved? If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, 1 John v. 9—11. We are not required to believe without evidence, for the most satisfactory evidence of the truth of the Gospel is clearly laid before us.

Do any inquire, then, what means are to be used to obtain faith? it may be replied, the testimony of God is to be used, for thus saith the Scriptures: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" "Faith cometh by hearing," that is, it comes by means of being acquainted with a report. The careful and candid examination of the Scriptures, and the attentive consideration of the import and evidence of the saving truth, are exercises solemnly required. "If any man," says Christ, "will do his will," that is, if he is determined at all hazards, to follow the truth wherever it may lead him, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God," John vii. 17.

Subordinate means do not exclude the supreme. If, in bringing us into being, and in preserving our existence, God acts by the instrumentality of means, why should not his influence in regeneration be consistent



with this instrumentality? The means which I have mentioned are of divine appointment, and are very unlike the means which are often employed: They present no obstacle—impose no impossible task—fill with no pride, but directly tend to bring the mind to the light of divine truth, to convince of guilt and helplessness, and to persuade the sinner that there is no hope for him except in the atonement of Christ. The call to repent and believe the Gospel, and the arguments and motives necessary to produce compliance, come to men at the same time, and are involved in each other. The exhortations to seek the Lord, and to call upon his name, to forsake every evil way, and every unrighteous thought, and to turn unto God, are connected with the revelation of the atonement, and with the promise of mercy and forgiveness, Isaiah lv. 3—8. There is, therefore, the greatest propriety in calling on men instantly to consider at once their guilt, and the way of forgiveness—their danger, and the adequate remedy, so freely provided; and in the faith of receiving the blessings of redemption through Christ, to call upon the name of the Lord, Rom. x. 12—14. Such are the means which God has appointed: The use of them accompanies the teaching of his Spirit, and is in fact a part of that teaching, whether the effect be immediately or gradually produced.

Does a person say, “I question if I have believed the genuine gospel; and how shall I ascertain the truth on the subject?” Let him ask himself what it was that first gave him any measure of relief from distress. Was it any favourable change in himself, any good desires, fervent wishes, or pious resolutions, or something wrought in him, as he hoped, by divine grace, to recommend him to the favour of God? What did he receive for the gospel? Is he fully persuaded in his own mind that God is well pleased in his Son; and that such is the glory and the value of his work, that nothing is necessary to the acceptance of any sinner on earth but a belief of the testimony concerning the perfection of the atonement.



The grand characteristic distinction of a Christian is, that he glories in the work of the Redeemer as the sole ground of his peace, Isaiah xlv. 24, 25. Gal. vi. 14. Phil. iii. 8, 9, 15. In opposition to the various ways in which unbelievers are seeking to recommend themselves to God, he is persuaded that the only righteousness through which he can be forgiven and accepted is already finished by the Saviour. However much the many systems of error may differ from each other, they all agree in making the foundation of a man's acceptance with God to be either in whole or in part something in himself; and from all of them Christianity is distinguished by the exhibition of the atonement of Christ, and the promise of salvation to all who believe in it, as a sanctuary for the distressed, and an anchor of hope to the most wretched. We are accordingly told in Jeremiah xxiii. 6. that the name of the Messiah is "the Lord our Righteousness," and in chapter xxxiii. 16. that this very name is, as it were, the great motto of the church of God, whereby it is distinguished from other societies; for, says the prophet, this is the name wherewith she shall be called, "The Lord our Righteousness." The meaning appears to be that "the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Jehovah in human nature, is the fundamental article in its constitution, is the charter of its privileges and hopes; that Jehovah our Righteousness is the song and the boast of all the followers of the Captain of Salvation; the motto on the banners of the church in her militant state—banners which shall at length be suspended in the temple above, retaining their appropriate inscription, when the warfare of the church shall terminate in everlasting peace." As the mount where a lamb was provided for Abraham was called Jehovah-Jireh—the Lord will see or provide; and as the altar which Moses built where Amalek was defeated was called Jehovah-Nissi—the Lord my banner, as memorials of what God had there wrought; so the truth concerning the justification of the church through the work of Immanuel is inscribed upon her in deep and



legible characters ; and of this truth she is a memorial to all generations.

I wish, my dear friend, by dwelling on this subject, to press upon your attention that *great truth*, with the belief of which the blessings of salvation are connected, and which gives importance to all the branches of divine revelation. If the import of what has been stated is perceived by an inquirer in its true light, the question will no longer be, “ How am I to believe ? ” or “ How am I to prepare myself for an interest in the Saviour ? ” No, it will be “ What has God testified concerning the character and work of his Son—what is the proclamation of mercy addressed to the world ? ” That which a sinner is called to believe is the truth of God, and particularly his testimony concerning the perfection and all-sufficiency of the atonement of Christ. It is in believing this testimony, and so becoming the subject of its influence, that we come to the enjoyment of the divine favour, and to know that we are the children of God. The first scriptural consolation received by the believer arises from his conviction that the gospel itself is true. To this truth he comes in the first instance, not as a Christian, but as a sinner ; and he looks for acceptance entirely through that atonement of which it testifies. His comfort, therefore, does not in the first instance, spring from reflecting on the feelings of his own mind towards it, though a sensible change in these is certainly effected. In believing the divine testimony, we are conscious of our doing so ; but this consciousness is not itself the source of our comfort ; the source of this is in the nature and the promise of the Gospel, which declares, that all who believe it are the children of God, and shall ultimately be saved : consciousness is only the medium through which our consolation is enjoyed. It is the thing believed that influences us, and not our reflection on what is passing in our minds.

It sometimes happens that a person will allow that salvation is of grace ; but can take no comfort from this, because faith is necessary to salvation. Now, it is evi-



dent that when a man sinks into despondency, and refuses to apply to the Gospel, because he has not, as he thinks, obtained faith, he does not really believe that salvation is of free favour ; for he is making the necessity of faith an obstruction to grace. It is true that, till the testimony and promise of the Gospel are believed, no relief can be had ; for how can a person apply to himself a promise which he does not believe ? But the necessity of believing good news, before they can give joy, arises from no defect in the joyful import of the news : it arises from the very nature of things, just as the necessity of a medicine's being used before it can better the health arises from no deficiency in its virtue, but entirely from the nature of the case. Suppose a person were to say, " The physician tells me that the prescribed medicine is able to cure me, but he also tells me that it cannot cure me unless I use it, and therefore his words give me no comfort, for I do not think that I have used it,"—would it not be evident that he was under a strange misapprehension, so much so as even to think that the application of the medicine was a something that could and must be done separate from the medicine to be applied,—that the application of it must precede the application of it,—and that, till this indescribable something was done, and he had thereby become convalescent, he could not apply it ; whereas the very thing to which he was called, and the only thing which could cure him, was the use of what had been prescribed. No doubt it is as using the medicine, or in using it, that a cure is to be expected ; but how, in the nature of things, could it be otherwise, and why then delay the application of it ?

Now, what is the faith of the Gospel, but the belief of that truth which testifies that salvation is a matter of pure favour,—being the gift of God through the atonement of Christ to every one who believes, and not the reward of any good thing in us, however denominated : And how can the necessity of believing that a thing is a matter of free grace be an obstruction to the freeness



of grace? Is it not evident that the person who views it in this light, means by faith something quite different from a belief of the truth, and a something which he must possess, not merely before the Gospel can, in the nature of things, give him relief, but before he can apply to it at all? Is not this to misapprehend the call to believe the Gospel as much as the invalid I have been speaking of had misapprehended the direction to apply the necessary medicine? Men indeed do not act thus foolishly in regard to the body; but many alas! do so in regard to the soul. This is done when faith is considered to be some principle or habit implanted in the heart, independent of the knowledge of the truth of God. Whenever this idea governs the mind, the sinner is led to seek for this mysterious principle, in the first instance, as the main ground of his peace; and is prevented by its misguiding influence from coming to the Gospel for relief. Now faith, you know, must, in the very nature of things, relate to some declaration, and cannot so much as be thought of without thinking at the same time of some report to be believed; so that it is absurd to speak of first believing that we are possessed of faith, and then coming to the testimony of God in order to believe it. It must be evident that in this case faith is not considered as the belief of the divine record, but as the performance of some inexplicable work of a very different nature.

It is no answer to this to say, as some mistaken friends of truth have done, that the mode of divine influence is inexplicable; for we ought to beware of confounding the mode in which the spirit operates with the thing he produces: The former is inexplicable—the latter is not. The apostles have taken the veil from the face of Moses, and have fully declared the Gospel with great plainness of speech, and particularly in exhibiting the way of acceptance with God: If their testimony, with its evidence, then, be once clearly discerned, what is there mysterious in giving it credit? It becomes us to believe every fact revealed by Heaven, though



the mode of those facts be to us inscrutable ; or, in the common sense of the term, mysterious ; it is reasonable to do so, for are we not surrounded with such things in the natural world ? But it is quite a different thing to receive mysteries of human origin, which are often used as a convenient retreat when all means of scriptural defence have failed. The services of religion are reasonable services, and not the effect of a blind impulse. The judgment is convinced by evidence so powerful, as has sometimes called forth the exclamation, "This is demonstration ;" the will is persuasively inclined by appropriate motives ; the affections are excited and fixed by suitable objects ; and the conscience is impressed by the authority of Heaven,—all being according to the distinctive properties of a rational nature.

These remarks are not unconnected with the subject of this letter, for they relate to things which have kept not a few from discerning the gracious and consolatory nature of the Gospel of peace. On this subject I have yet some more observations to make, which I reserve for another letter.—In the mean time, believe me to be yours, &c.

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## LETTER XXI.

### ON THE GRACIOUS AND CONSOLATORY NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.

The happiness of the first Christians—Remarks on the witness of the Spirit—Christian comfort increased by obedience—Action the test of sentiments—The Gospel illustrated by the parables in Luke xv.—The riches of Divine Grace a manifestation of the truth of the Gospel—Remarks on Luke xiii. 24, 25. Heb. x. 26, 27. Hos. iv. 17. Heb. xii. 17. and 1 Tim. i. 13.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I RESUME the subject of my last letter by referring you to the happiness of the first Christians. We cannot



have a better rule to judge by than the effects produced in the first believers of the Gospel ; for in them the genuine nature of its influences must certainly be seen. Now we find that they received it with emotions of joy and of gladness. They who received it on the day of Pentecost continued daily with one accord in the temple, and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Acts ii. 46. Peter and John rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ, Acts v. 41. When Philip preached in Samaria, there was great joy in that city ; when the Ethiopian eunuch believed, he went on his way rejoicing ; and we find the like happiness in the jailor of Philippi, and in the Thessalonians who received the word in much affliction, with joy in the Holy Ghost, Acts viii. 8, 39. 1 Thess. i. 6. Nor was this confined to the very first converts : Peter, when not far from the time of his death, said of the great body of Christians then on earth, " Whom having not seen ye love ; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory ;" and John, when far advanced in years, wrote to his brethren, that their joy might be full, 1 Pet. i. 8. The apostles address them as partakers of the Spirit of adoption,—as governed by love to God from a sense of his love to them, and as in the enjoyment of peace with him, through the atonement of his Son, Rom. viii. 15. 1 John iv. 19. Rom. v. 1, 11. They exhort them to obedience to God,—to mutual love and forgiveness,—and indeed to universal holiness, from the consideration of their being redeemed from sin and in a state of acceptance ;—of their having been loved and forgiven of God, and blessed for the sake of their Lord,—and of their being the temples of his Spirit. Now all this supposes that they had a habitual consciousness of their being the subjects of divine grace, for otherwise these motives could not have had the influence which it is taken for granted they possessed. It is wrong to ascribe this to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, for of these,



all, even of the first Christians, did not partake, and neither were they always tokens of the acceptance of those who had them, Matth. vii. 22, 23. 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. Their peace, confidence, and joy, arose from faith in the Gospel, and from the springs of consolation which it opened to them as they continued to exercise it in constant obedience and patient suffering, Rom. viii. 31—39.; xv. 13.

You must see, then, that the same ground of confidence and sources of happiness are exhibited to us, and our access to all of them is as free as was theirs. We ought therefore to look to the same great and transporting truths which animated them. We have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. We ought not to rest satisfied with expressing merely a willingness or a desire to love and obey the Redeemer, and to put our confidence in Him: we ought actually to confide in Him, and to serve and obey Him.

The witness of the Spirit is not a privilege peculiar to the primitive disciples. Never did it consist in a voice from Heaven proclaiming that an individual in particular was now made a child of God, or in any private internal revelation, assuring him of his being forgiven and accepted. Neither does it consist in suggesting some promise of Scripture to the mind, with a powerful impression, as if in this way God revealed to man that he is in a state of salvation. Were it so, it would follow that revelation is not perfect, and that God continues to give revelations, and revelations of new truths too; for with regard to the actual possession of spiritual blessings by any individual, the Scriptures contain no direct declaration. When, therefore, a person's dejection arises from the want of such impressions of Scripture promises as he has heard or read of others having felt, he is forgetting that all the promises are yea and amen through the work of Christ; and that every sinner who believes in that work has an interest in all of them, in as far as his circumstances require the blessings they contain; and he is refusing to credit the di-



vine word without some additional evidence to confirm it. The Spirit does indeed bring the truth to our remembrance; but it is by directing us to the true meaning of his word, and not by detaching one part of it from another, and affixing to it a meaning which it does not bear where it stands. He opened the understandings of the apostles to perceive the meaning and the glory of the sayings of Christ, many of which they had forgotten, and of all of which they had been previously comparatively ignorant: He still keeps alive in our remembrance the doctrines, promises and precepts of Scripture, and in particular he enlightens the mind as to the import of the great truths that regard the character and the work of the Saviour; and thus fills with strong consolation and good hope through grace, John xiv. 16, 17—26.; xv. 26.; xvi. 8—15.

I need not say that this is quite a different thing from applying promises or passages of Scripture without enlightening the understanding or rectifying the heart, and which have no relation to the situation of the person; which were to tear them from their connection, and wholly to misapply them. With regard to promises that teach the cause or origin of redemption, which is the grace of God, no one has a warrant to consider himself in possession of the blessing but in the way of his believing in the propitiation of Christ, through which this grace is manifested to sinners: And with regard to such promises as are made to particular characters, they can only apply to any individual in as far as his character and circumstances answer to those referred to in them.

When people wait for particular impressions as the rule of their duty, the ground of their faith, or the spring of their comfort, it is evident that the stress is laid not upon the truth contained in the Scripture impressed, but wholly on the impression itself, as a token that the passage is immediately sent from God to the individual. Does not this open a door to the wildest enthusiasm? Does it not tend to disparage the word



of the living God, to supplant his voice which is there heard, and to make that Gospel which is his power to give place to the roamings of fancy, and the offspring of mere imagination? Some accordingly who have lived in the neglect of the Scriptures, and of Christian diligence, have said that they enjoyed the hope of salvation, because certain promises had at some periods been powerfully impressed upon their minds. Such mistaken notions have done incalculable harm to those who have acted on them, and have excited much prejudice against every thing connected with the work of the Spirit; and in particular against that part of it which respects the comfort and the firm confidence of the people of God. On the Scripture doctrine concerning this, allow me to say a very few words.

The Scriptures unequivocally declare, that sinners become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus: This, therefore, is the witness or testimony of the Spirit: and when he enables us to perceive the import, evidence, and excellence of the Gospel, he draws forth the witness of our conscience, that we now see, believe, and love the truth. It is not, then, by immediate revelation, or direct suggestions, nor even by shining upon his own work in the mind, (unless in as far as by mutual re-action, the truth illustrates its effects, and they again illustrate the truth,) but by so influencing us as to make us receive the love of what is proclaimed openly in the Scriptures, that the Spirit of God enables us to apply to ourselves his testimony in them to the sonship of all who believe in the Saviour. He may do so at one time by directing the mind to this, and in another case to that portion of Scripture, for there is such a harmony in sacred truth that a proper view of one branch of it will lead to the knowledge of others.

I have hinted that by a mutual re-action the truth of God illustrates its effects, and these again illustrate the truth. Now in regard to this it claims your attention, that in proportion as we experience the healing



influence of the Gospel on our heart and ways, we perceive a correspondence between what the Spirit of God has written in his word, and what has been effected in us, so that the testimony of the divine Spirit, and that of our own spirits agree. And thus our faith in the truth is confirmed, and we feel increasingly satisfied that we have not been deceiving ourselves. But do you ask, my dear friend, how it is that we have proof in the first instance of our seeing and believing the Gospel? I need not tell you, that as far as experience can guide us, the proofs of seeing or believing any thing resolve themselves into their objects. I mean that we are no farther conscious that we see an object, than as the object itself affects us, and that we are no farther sensible of believing a report than as it impresses us. We are so constituted, that when we hear, see, or feel objects, we are immediately sensible that we do so, without making our hearing, seeing, or feeling the subject of particular reflection; and the case is similar with the operations of the mind.

We come, therefore to know, in the first instance, that we see an object, or believe a proposition, not by reflecting on any thing in ourselves, but by finding that the object seen, or the testimony believed, affects us. There is a kind of union produced between the mind and what is seen or credited by it, so that we are pained or gladdened, distressed or relieved, according to the light in which it appears to us. It is therefore by the Gospel itself affecting his mind, according to its nature, that a sinner on believing it becomes conscious that it is the object of his faith.

When he discerns the glory and suitableness of the character and the salvation of Christ, both as they regard God and man, he becomes sensible that what he sees in the Saviour is the light of his mind—the hope of his heart—and the stay of his soul:—Ask him while he is thus delightfully engaged, and he will instantly confess his faith; though at the time he is so occupied



with the glorious discovery of the truth itself, that the exercise of his own mind is not the object of his particular attention.

On this principle the Scriptures call on believers to confess their faith on their first receiving the truth (Rom. x. 9.) ; and we accordingly find them saying, " Lord, I believe"—" I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," John ix. 38. Acts viii. 37. It is this sense of a union and connection between his Spirit and the Saviour in whom he believes, which satisfies the believer that he has indeed obtained from him the privilege of a place in the family of God, John i. 12.

This confidence can be maintained in no other way than by abiding in the faith of that truth which produced it at first. When his faith works by love, and the natural fruits of love continue and abound in him, the confidence of a Christian is thereby confirmed. In as far as he thus continues the subject of the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, he is conscious that God has given him of his Spirit, or mind, because he is growing in resemblance to him, 1 John iii. 7, 14, 19. ; and iv. 13.

I am far from meaning that the whole of our happiness will in this case arise from the banishment of the tormenting fear, that we have been deceiving ourselves, as if the whole value of the fruits of faith arose from the evidences which they afford of our being in a state of pardon and acceptance. This were to confine the blessing of salvation to a change of state, and our consequent escape from the wrath to come—a notion which lies at the bottom of that cold, formal, and inefficient religion which is so common in the world. Holiness is itself the happiness of the soul, and the wrath to come is not mere misery, but misery arising from the government and effects of a depraved heart.

It is with the diseases and the cure of the soul as with the disorders and cure of the body : If you were suffering under some dangerous malady it would be cause of pleasure to you if a physician, in whose skill and integ-



rity you had confidence, assured you, that by the use of certain medicines you would certainly recover. But would not your joy be increased when, in using the medicines, you found the strength of your disease gradually abating, and the very effects produced which the physician foretold? Would not your confidence in him be likewise increased, and would you not have the fullest conviction that you had rightly understood his prescriptions? Nor would your happiness arise merely from the evidence which your renovated health afforded you, that you had rightly understood and followed his prescriptions—it would arise from your health itself. To gain health was your object in using the requisite medicines, and of course all their value arose from their fitness to produce this end. In the enjoyment therefore, of the vigour and the spirit of health, your happiness, so far as the body is concerned, would doubtless consist.

It is the same, my dear friend, with the believer of the Gospel: In proportion to the evidence or demonstration with which the truth itself strikes the mind, as an exhibition of the perfect atonement of Christ, and of the gracious character of God, as revealed in it, will be the consequent peace and joy of the mind before any previous consideration of the change effected in it.—Still, by comparing the change produced by this means in the temper and disposition, with the effects of faith, as described in Scripture, the nature of this peace and joy will be proved; and the more conformity that is seen between the character of the Saviour, as there delineated, and the effects of the Gospel upon us, the more will they be increased. The spring of peace under a sense of guilt, and the ground of glorying, are still as at first the cross of Christ; but faith in the Saviour has been increased by its exercise in acts of obedience, and so has the peace springing from its object as thus more fully seen and more firmly confided in. Obedience is by no means the ground of this peace, though by acts of obedi-



ence faith in the true ground of peace has been exercised, and consequently strengthened.

If our actions do not in some measure correspond with what we profess to believe, our own conscience must condemn us, for we cannot but see that the volitions by which we act in contradiction to the sentiments which we profess to hold, must arise from some sentiment lurking in our mind that is in opposition to the principles which we confess with the mouth. In this case our conduct is a constant contradiction of our professed creed, and proves, that what we believe, allowing us to be sincere, is contrary to, or a corruption of the Gospel; for all our conduct proceeds upon some corresponding sentiment. If, on the other hand, our dispositions and conduct are in some measure in accordance with the avowed object of our faith, we have increasing evidence of the truth of what we find sanctifying our souls, and that we are indeed what we appear to be, John ii. 3. ; iii. 18, 19. There is a happiness arising from being engaged in exercises founded upon, and excited and governed by the Gospel, which is additional to the joy obtained on the first reception of the truth. Actions are the test of sentiments, and the more that we abound in the active duties of Christianity under the influence of the Gospel, the more do we glorify God, and the more must our confidence in the truth be increased. This is quite a different thing from deriving our peace from our own works rather than from the atonement, and so substituting evidences of faith for the foundation. They are not the foundation of peace under a sense of guilt, but yet the healing influence of the Gospel must in itself be connected with happiness, and must satisfy us that we have not mistaken the nature of the divine testimony, or received as it what is opposite to, or inconsistent with its spirit.

While the joy of a Christian, like that of a man, in a matter of human testimony, arises from the good news he believes, and not from reflecting on the workings of



his mind, yet it deserves your particular notice, that there may be nothing in a matter of human testimony to which the mind of the hearer is averse ; whereas the mind of man is naturally and deeply opposed to the Gospel, so that the two cases, though in certain respects alike, are in other respects different. The Christian, knowing the hostility of his heart to the truth of God, and that nothing short of the power of the divine Spirit could have led him to receive the love of it, finds in this manifestation of special love an additional cause of gratitude, and, of course, also of joy.

Allow me to remind you, my dear friend, that as every principle of Christian obedience commences with the reception of the message of mercy, so this consolatory message is addressed to all, in order that in believing it they may be renewed in the spirit of their mind. The invitations of the Gospel are not withheld till a certain preparatory process has been gone through, as if certain feelings or qualities of the mind entitled to them. If a sinner is taught that it is not his immediate duty to believe the Gospel, he may flatter himself with a persuasion of safety in his preparatory labours, and perhaps die in his sins. And why then act as if repentance must precede the invitations of mercy ? It is only in the declarations of the Gospel that a warrant can be found to say to a sinner, " Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out ;" and the invitations of mercy, while they afford hope, by their import carry home conviction to the soul. In connection with the cross let the divine law be enforced, but never ought the alarm excited by the latter to be viewed as entitling to the benefit of the former. The awakened jailor at Philippi was not encouraged to draw comfort from his distress and alarm, but from the grace of the Gospel only. Let not the questions be, How long have I been distressed and alarmed ? Have my agitations and fears been sufficiently great ? How were my convictions and trouble produced ? But let the questions with yourself be—Am not I a sinner before God, and righteously con-



demned ? And is there not in the Gospel of the grace of God, and in nothing else, an all-sufficient remedy, completely suited to my state, and free for my use ?

It is true that our Lord says, "They that be whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick." But he does not mean by this that none need a physician but such as are *sensible* of sickness, for the need of a physician depends, not upon being sensible of danger, but upon the sickness itself, which is the cause of danger. The fact is, that if there be any difference, the man who is insensible of his danger is more in want of the physician than he who is aware of it. Our Lord is speaking to the Pharisees on their own principles : They thought themselves righteous, or, in other words whole, and they reckoned the Publicans sinners, or, in other words, sick. Our Lord, for the sake of argument as it were, allowed that they were whole ; but, says he, as it behoves a physician to go among the sick, and not among people in health, so it behoves me to go to the unrighteous ; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. It is then of men's actual need of a Saviour, and not of their *sense* of this that he here speaks, Matt. ix. 12, 13.

When the attention of an awakened sinner is turned to something in himself, instead of being at once directed to the Saviour and his perfect sacrifice, the result must be of a very perplexing and distressing nature. It may also prove ultimately injurious, because it is calculated to lead him to trust to the fancied holy feelings of his mind, and so to stop short of the refuge exhibited in the Gospel.

It is easy to see, that if the encouragement to come to Christ be made to depend on the circumstance of feeling a certain degree of penitence and humility, of convictions of guilt, and of compunction because of it, the self-righteous alone will think they possess these qualifications. Those who are truly humbled under a sense of sin and unworthiness, will never think themselves sufficiently so to warrant them to take encouragement



from it, and they will therefore be in danger of putting from them the only means of relief to a guilty conscience.

I will not attempt to distinguish between convictions which issue in conversion, and such as do not ; but without all question, to suppose that the subject of the former considers them as a holy qualification, is as absurd as to suppose that a man who feels himself greatly diseased can at the same moment think himself perfectly whole. A person who is really conscious of sin has a powerful claim on our sympathy :—Never let his misery be mocked, by being told that his convictions are *in themselves* self-righteous, for that cannot be. But let him be explicitly told, that his distress of mind can never recommend him to the divine mercy—that there is nothing now more than before, between him and perdition but the mercy which flows through the atonement of Jesus ; and that to the Saviour he ought instantly to flee.

The source of our comfort under a sense of guilt is the nature of the Gospel itself, and not the state of our minds. Such is its nature, that he who is taught its true glory, must, on proper reflection, be convinced that God had never revealed it, had he not designed to save all who came to the knowledge of its true import. It exhibits the most majestic grandeur and the most amiable goodness—it levels the pride of man, and humbles him in the dust ; and yet lays a solid foundation for his hope, and inspires him with confidence before God—it exhibits his absolute dependence on Heaven, and yet elevates him to the highest happiness. The divine mercy is so displayed as, instead of encouraging, or emboldening to sin, to be the strongest preservative from it ; and yet it can be dispensed, not merely to the imperfectly good, but to the chief of sinners, because it is communicated through a medium which exhibits the infinitude of the divine justice, and the glory of the divine law. There is nothing here like a salvation by halves. The infinite moral distance between God and transgressors is



not removed by the advances of the sinner ; God himself comes down into our world in our own nature, not merely to meet the returning sinner, but to overtake the guilty, who are morally wandering from him. There is in all this a decisive, overpowering, and divine evidence, which shines like a sunbeam in the truth itself, and shows at once its divinity and its design.

Independently, then, of the promise of Heaven, the Gospel itself manifests in a measure, that the salvation of all who believe it, and so come under its transforming influence, must be the purpose of God in the display of his character. The promise of him who cannot lie confirms this view of the great object of the work of Christ, and lays the most solid foundation for the hope of believers.

Allow me, my dear friend, in illustration of the subject of the richness and the freeness of the grace of God, to refer you to the parables contained in the fifteenth chapter of the gospel by Luke. Our Lord, in these parables, exposes the unreasonableness of the sentiments and feelings of the Scribes and Pharisees in regard to the Publicans and Sinners. The former had said of Jesus, " This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them ;" thereby censuring him for directing so much of his attention to the latter. The Saviour, in vindication of himself, appeals to human feeling to show that it was becoming in him to receive such characters, even granting that the Scribes and Pharisees had been altogether innocent. The latter trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Now they were far, very far indeed, from being righteous characters ; on the contrary, they manifested a greater degree of enmity against God than did the very persons on whom they looked down with sovereign contempt. For the sake of argument, however, our Lord waived the consideration of their true character, and proceeded on the ground that they were what they pretended to be. Even granting that they were righteous, was it not most congruous to human feelings and ideas to have



pleasure in recovering the lost ? His design at present was not to detect their hypocrisy, but to vindicate his own conduct, which they had blamed ; and, the better to effect his purpose, he proceeds on the supposition that they were righteous persons, who needed no repentance. If it be natural for the shepherd to leave the ninety and nine of his flock, and to give all his labour and his concern to the pursuit of the one solitary wanderer,—if it was natural in the woman, who had lost one of ten pieces of silver, to be comparatively listless as to the nine that were secure, and to turn her particular attention to the one which she had lost,—and if it was natural in the father to embrace the son who had been given up for dead,—was it not to be expected that the Saviour would leave the righteous who needed not his salvation, and go in quest of those who were wandering from God, were lost at once to piety and to happiness, and were exposed to the most fearful destruction ?

In the parable of the prodigal son, the elder brother represents the Scribes and Pharisees, who are supposed never to have disobeyed their Father, and to be heirs of the inheritance. This was indeed far from being their character or their privilege, but the reasoning upon the supposition that it was, had the most powerful tendency to expose their unhallowed and inhuman disposition in excluding the Publicans and Sinners from mercy. If one child of a family falls sick, is not that the one, towards whom all the tenderness of the mother is turned ! She loves all the family, but the healthy among them need not the degree of attention which the individual who is sick does ; and to that one therefore she directs the full tide of her sympathy. And what should we think of the children who could complain of her endeavours to save their afflicted brother or sister ? Would not every heart instantly condemn the selfishness, envy, and barbarity discovered ? And would it not be natural in the mother to rejoice over her recovered child with a greater glow of affection than over those



who never were in danger ? This is a part of our nature, the workings of which are experienced even in the abodes of the blessed ; for there, more joy is felt over the repentant sinner than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. Thus, by a number of tender, natural, and affecting figures, does the Saviour illustrate the riches of the mercy and the love of God, and the design of his own coming, which was not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

To this hour, few things give greater offence to the formal religionist than to put him on a level, even but as to acceptance with God, with those who have been grossly wicked. He may in words speak of grace and of mercy, but what he means by them is quite different from their scriptural import. Now, even *were* such the righteous and devout characters which they deem themselves, their conduct is quite inexcusable. Were they pure as angels, would they be right in murmuring at the salvation of sinners ? Yet does it not often happen that when some careless and ungodly character has been led to see the evil of his ways, and has fled for refuge to the covert of the atonement, and has found peace and joy in believing, such formalists, like the elder brother in the parable, break forth into the most bitter revilings and slanders, and spare no pains to misrepresent and calumniate the doctrine of the grace of God. But in receiving such wretched characters, God only does what, in cases such as these parables exhibit, those very formalists would themselves both commend and imitate.

Is it not matter of great consolation that the Saviour was not ashamed to vindicate the doctrine of salvation by the free favour of Heaven, and to preach it to all who came to him, whosoever they were ? How beautifully has he represented the readiness of God to receive the returning sinner ! When the father saw his son a great way off, he ran to him and embraced him, and commanded him to be treated as one of his children ; and is not this the manner of God ? This is not like the mercy for which the world pleads. Men, from a



consciousness of guilt, are afraid to trust to mere justice ; and from the pride of their hearts, they are unwilling to submit to mere mercy. But it is the glory of the Gospel that forgiveness does not depend on any difference that may exist between one man and another ; for it exhibits holiness and truth, justice and mercy, in their highest perfections, going hand in hand in delivering the ungodly. It confirms the intimations and forebodings of the guilty conscience ; but at the same time removes its alarm by the application of the atonement. That same cross which exhibits the evil and malignity of sin, inspires the transgressor with hope ; that same sacrifice which displays the divine purity and holiness in their highest lustre, commands confidence in God as a Father and a Friend ; and that same truth which abases the pride of the sinner, and lays him at the feet of his offended Lord, calls him away from the poor and perishing interests of time, to glory, honour and immortality. Struck with these and such like views of the Gospel, the conviction of the mind is commanded, and the confidence of the trembling sinner is gained. He rests persuaded that a scheme so glorious in itself, so worthy of God, and so suited to the relation between the Creator and man, must certainly be divine. Who but God could be the author of a plan like this ? The mercy which it displays is altogether worthy of Him. The forgiveness which he here proclaims is inexpressibly above our thoughts. It is not like the reluctant, limited, and half forgiveness of men, but is full, free, and irrevocable. When he invites the sinner and the unrighteous man to return unto him in the confidence of obtaining pardon, he meets the objection which might arise from the boundless extent of the grace which he exhibits. “ Do not judge of me by the feelings and the conduct of men, whether yourselves or others. I will certainly multiply to pardon, for my ways of forgiveness are not like your ways, neither are my thoughts of mercy and of grace like to your thoughts. I am God, and not man ; and as far as I



am above you in glory and in grandeur, am I above you in mercy and loving-kindness. I am the holy, the separated One of Israel,—distinguished not less by my goodness than by my greatness," Isa. lv. 7—9. Hosea xi. 8, 9.

Truly this is not the manner of man. It is the manner of God, even of the holy or the peerless one of Israel, who is infinitely elevated above all that is created, imperfect, and impure. Such is the grandeur of this revelation, that he appears as if determined to astonish the most incredulous and wretched into an impossibility of questioning the infinite extent of his grace. When a sinner is taught the import of this manifestation of his glory, he is overwhelmed with admiration, and exclaims, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" This is a scheme which transcends all the natural conceptions of man, baffles all his wisdom, and calls him to bow, with the spirit of a little child, to its humbling dictates.

In this humble submission to the plan of mercy, lies the great difficulty in the way of a sinner's believing in Christ. It was, in one sense, easier for Naaman to bathe in Jordan, than to return home and wash in Abana and Pharpar: but there was a difficulty in his mind. The great hindrance was, the pride of his heart—which rose against the thought of stooping to trust to the word of the prophet, without doing some great thing himself, 2 Kings v. 9—15. This he considered as an act of self-degradation; and the case is similar with sinners, in regard to the plan of salvation through faith in the atonement of Christ. The difficulty of believing in him does not arise from any thing in the act itself, but from its depriving the sinner of all ground of boasting, and being thus humbling to his pride. What difficulty is there in it, compared with the trouble, the labour, and the disappointment of the man who attempts to be accepted through deeds of his own? How



adapted to the circumstances of sinners ready to perish, is the unlimited proclamation of mercy through Christ?

You once mentioned, that some have been stumbled as to the unlimited calls of the Gospel, by the argument used to enforce the exhortation of our Lord, to “strive to enter in at the strait gate;” namely, “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able,” Luke xiii. 24. But there are two considerations which show that they mistake the meaning of the passage. In the first place, the 24th and 25th verses should be read together, and the latter will then mark the time and the circumstances in which men shall unavailingly seek to enter in. It will be “when the Master hath risen up, and hath shut to the door,” that is, after death and at the judgment, so that it is not the exclusion of any who seek the Lord in this life, that is intended, but that of those who have lived and died in unbelief and impenitence. In the second place, our Lord is not speaking of *conversion*, but of admittance into heaven, Matt. viii. 11, 12.; vii. 22, 23. By the strait gate, mentioned in the sermon on the mount, we are to understand that by which we are to enter on the *course* that leads to everlasting life; but by the strait gate in this passage, we are to understand the door of the heavenly temple itself, which is at the *end* of this course. This is confirmed by the language of the following verses, 26—30. Heaven is here, as in several other places, represented under the notion of a nuptial festival, the solemnities of which usually took place at night. The guests at these feasts entered by a gate designed to receive them, which, at the time they were to come, was made narrow, the wicket only being left open, that no improper person might rush in. At a particular time the door was shut, and was not to be opened to any one who came too late, and stood knocking without. Thus we find that after the wise virgins had entered with the bridegroom, the gate was shut, and was not opened to the foolish virgins who were too late,



and stood without in vain calling for admittance, Matt. xxv. 10—12.

Now this is not a representation of a person in the *present* life seeking mercy and spiritual blessings through Christ, and yet being denied them; but of a person who, though he had a profession of religion, was yet an unbeliever, seeking at last to be delivered from hell, and admitted into heaven. Such a wish is not prompted by any holy principle, but merely by the natural aversion to misery, and desire of happiness, which is inherent in man. The exhortation then in the sermon on the Mount, to enter in at the strait gate, and that in this place to strive to enter in at the strait gate, are exhortations not to things which may be done while the sinner continues in unbelief and impenitence, but to those obedient exercises which are connected with salvation.

As the Israelites fell short of the land of promise through unbelief, because it kept them from going up to possess it, so men are warned of the indispensable necessity of entering on that course which is begun by faith in Christ, and of continuing in it to the end in the constant and growing exercise of the same faith. It is thus that we are to labour to enter into that rest, to strive mightily for this object, to agonize, as the word here used means, to enter at last into the heavenly mansions, and to avoid every entanglement that might impede our progress in the race of faith, and hinder that exertion which is necessary in the Christian warfare, Heb. iv. 11. Col. i. 29. 2 Tim. ii. 5. Heb. xii. 1.

You will see, then, that there is nothing in our Lord's words like an intimation that any who come to him in the present life shall be rejected. God saves all who come to him in the name of Christ, and implore salvation for his sake. But if the love of sin keep from seeking deliverance according to the plan of the gospel, what injustice is done to the sinner if he is allowed to take his own choice, and to reap the fruit of that seed which he here voluntarily sowed? Is the Almighty under any ob-



ligations to save sinners against their own will ? May he not (as he declares he will) say to them at the last day —“ Because I called and they refused, therefore, though they call on me I will not answer, though they seek me early,” that is earnestly, “ they shall not find me,” Prov. i. 24—28.

You ask, dear friend, what is the meaning of Heb. x. 26, 27. in which we are told, that “ if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment.” The reference here is not to every sin which is committed with the consent of the will, for as in this consent the very essence of sin consists, it is found more or less in every transgression, but to presumptuous, deliberate, and final apostacy from a profession of the faith, Prov. i. 29. The apostle has in his eye those sins for which, under the law of Moses, no sacrifice was provided, and particularly the crime of sinning presumptuously, or with an high hand directly against God himself, and preferring to him the idols of the heathen. Deut. xvii. 2—7. Num. xv. 30, 31. The person guilty of thus sinning presumptuously was condemned to die under the hand of two or three witnesses. But numbers who commit those crimes for which no sacrifice was appointed by the law obtained mercy through the sacrifice of Christ, which then remained to be offered ; witness Aaron, David, Manasseh and others. In the case of those, however, who wilfully, that is presumptuously, reject the atonement of Jesus, there remaineth no other sacrifice for sins to be offered, and, therefore there remains nothing but a certain fearful expectation of judgment. Not that such shall not obtain mercy, even though brought to repentance, but that, as there is no salvation except through the sacrifice of Christ, they must inevitably perish if they persist in rejecting it. In doing so they reject the only remedy, and must abide the consequences, and to them these must be tremendous in the extreme.

When Joshua says to the Israelites, “ Ye cannot



• serve the Lord, for he is an holy God ; he is a jealous God ; he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins," he could not mean that Jehovah, whose name had been revealed as " keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin," would not at all, or in any way forgive their offences, if his mercy were supplicated in a proper manner ; but that Jehovah was a jealous God, and that as a wife or a husband cannot be satisfied with divided affection, so they could not serve him and idols at the same time ; and that, therefore, attachment to the latter could not be tolerated, and if persisted in, then he who had formerly " done them good would turn and do them hurt, yea even consume them," Joshua xxiv. 19, 20. When Moses, speaking of him whom God was to send with Israel through the wilderness, says, " Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions," he did not mean, that he would absolutely, in no respect or circumstances pardon them, but that God would admit of no rival, and that, therefore, if sin were not confessed and forsaken, it would infallibly be their ruin, Exod. xxiii. 20, 21. That even apostates are not, while in this world, placed beyond the reach of mercy, appears from the instructions given by Paul to Timothy, in relation to them. Speaking of Hymeneus and Philetus, who had in reality departed from the truth, though they had not renounced the name of Christian, he says, with an obvious reference to persons of this description—" The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth," 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18, 24, 25. The former of these, and another of the same character, he elsewhere says he had delivered unto Satan, or excluded from all connection with the church of Christ, but it was " that they might learn not to blaspheme ;" or, in other words, that they might be brought to repentance, 1 Tim. i. 20.



The Scriptures, when giving general descriptions of character, never represent any as while in this life placed beyond the reach of the divine mercy, unless it be those who, in the apostolic age, apostatized from the faith, and blasphemed the Holy Ghost, after having witnessed and having themselves been made partakers of the extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Spirit of God, and having exhibited before the world and the church of God, those miraculous powers which formed the last grand evidence of the truth of the Gospel. Farther than this, *ut all events*, the Scriptures, I apprehend, cannot on any just principle of interpretation, be considered as carrying the matter, and I need not say, that what was of course limited to the age of miracles, cannot extend to subsequent periods.

Do not, then, perplex yourself in relation to the sin of blasphemy against the Spirit of God. The Scriptures limit not the invitations of the Gospel, or the calls to repentance, and no sinner who hears it, shall perish, but he who continues through life, and at last dies in unbelief of the inspired testimony of the word of God. The restriction on the prayers of Christians, which is contained in 1 John v. 16. must either mean, that when a man who had made a profession of the faith, and was esteemed a brother, acted so as to manifest that he was still an ungodly character, it were wrong to pray for him under the character of a *Christian*, or to plead in his behalf the peculiar promises made to the children of God, but by no means that it would be wrong to pray for his conversion and forgiveness; or else it refers to those temporal and evidently supernaturally inflicted judgments with which, in apostolic times, God visited certain iniquities. But though Christians might not pray for the removal of these calamities, they might pray for the salvation of the soul; just as Jeremiah, though forbidden to pray that the people might not be sent into captivity, continued to preach to them, and to pray for their salvation, Jer. vii. 14—16. compared with Micah vii. 8, 9, 18—29. I merely hint at the



- import of this and other passages, as my limits will not admit of doing more ; and I mention both these views, because, as one of them must be the meaning, and as either of them equally removes your difficulty, my object is gained without a more particular discussion, for which at present I have not space.

It is a consideration sufficiently awful, that comparatively few apostates ever come to repentance. Other sinners are "dead in trespasses and sins," but *they* are said to be "twice dead," Jude 12. What can be said or done by man, to instruct them or to make them feel, which has not already been often said and done, without having produced any salutary effect ? There is certainly more hope of success in going "out to the highways and the hedges," than in preaching to those who have long heard the Gospel, and yet have rejected it. But what is "impossible with men," is not so with God, for with him "all things are possible." This last consideration, which is stated by our Lord after he had said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God !" may encourage us still to use what means may be in our power, while the others afford us alarming warnings by which, through the blessing of God, to endeavour to awaken apostates to a sense of their imminent danger, and of the tremendous fate which awaits them, if they shall dare to persist in their rebellion. What an opportunity is there afforded, in such circumstances, of showing the hardening effect of habitual wickedness and profaneness, as expressed in these words of the prophet, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Jer. xiii. 23. The truth, in itself, is the same as ever ; but it is not the same to such an individual, for every instance of rebellion against light renders it the easier to resist it again.

You mention the fears entertained by some, when they read such a passage as Hosea iv. 17. where God says, "Ephraim is joined to his idols ; let him alone."



Let me remind you of the importance of comparing Scripture with Scripture, and of examining the connection which every passage has with what precedes and follows it. If you adopt this rule in the present case, you will find that these words are addressed to Judah, and contain a charge to have no fellowship with the children of Ephraim, in their idolatrous courses. Accordingly, the prophet says, in the 15th verse, "Though Israel sin, yet let not Judah offend, and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Bethaven." They are warned against the idolatry of the ten tribes who were joined to idols: "Let them alone," says God, that is, "Keep aloof from them; have no fellowship with them in their worship; have no unnecessary intercourse with them, lest ye be ensnared." The meaning is similar to that of our Lord's words respecting the Scribes and Pharisees, "Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind;" Matt. xv. 14. that is, Beware of their doctrine, and follow them not as your guide, for "if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." As to what he says of them in Matt. xxiii. 2, 3. it respects them in their civil character, as rulers, and is of similar import with the apostolic exhortation, to "be subject to the powers that be," Rom. xiii. 1. Now, as our Lord continued to preach to these very men, so did the prophet continue to preach to Ephraim. Hosea xiv. 1—4. It is not true, therefore, that God used no farther means to bring the ten tribes to repentance, and of course he could not say that no more would be used by him. If God had said, I am determined to let Ephraim alone, there would have been no hope for him; but it claims your attention, that, though God laid a restraint on his creatures, yet he laid none upon his own mercy; but reserved to himself the full exercise of his sovereign grace. We accordingly find in chap. xiv. 8. that Ephraim is represented as casting his idols from him. There is nothing here then, like a declaration that the people in question were already beyond the reach of the divine mercy.



It is to be regretted that not a few, when first awakened to a sense of the importance of sacred things, and likewise Christians who are but ill-informed, or feeble in mind, or who have a tincture of melancholy, are apt to dwell on such passages of Scripture as these, which, when not viewed in connection with divine truth in general, and in their relation to the special object for which they were written, are very much fitted to perplex. By this means the former are kept from discerning the glory, suitableness, and freeness of the Gospel of peace, and are held in the most unhappy bondage; and the latter are hindered from enjoying the full benefit, even of what they in a measure may know.

Another passage which has occasioned great perplexity to inquirers is that, in which speaking of Esau, the apostle says, "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears," Heb. xii. 17. Now, what was it that Esau sought? Repentance, you know, signifies a change of mind, and what he sought was to effect such a change in the mind of his father Isaac as would lead him either to revoke the blessing granted to Jacob and give it to himself, or at least to grant him such a blessing as might in a great measure supersede or cancel the former. It was not then any change in his own mind that he sought,—it was by no means that he himself might become the subject of repentance towards God, nor was it that he might become grieved in his heart, (indeed deeply grieved he was already,) and therefore he is far, very far from being an example of a sinner seeking salvation and yet being denied it, for of spiritual blessings Esau was not so much as thinking at the time.

If his request had extended only to what was consistent with Jacob's having the pre-eminence, as the head of the people from whom the Messiah was to spring, there was another blessing for him, and he obtained it;



but his desire was to have that clause of Jacob's reversed,—be “lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee.” This would have satisfied him, for the things of this life alone did he care for.

But as the temporal inheritance included in the blessing was a figure of the heavenly inheritance, on which account Esau was guilty of profaneness in despising his birthright, the apostle employs this history to illustrate the necessity of continuing in the faith and obedience of the Gospel—the danger of trusting to external privileges, and the awful fate of such as are induced by any consideration to depart from the truth. In the case of Esau, the latter may see what will be their feelings in the day of Christ, when they shall see many coming from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and sitting down in the kingdom of God, while they themselves are thrust out. As he “cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry,” and “lifted up his voice and wept” when he found that the temporal inheritance was gone, so “there shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth” when the heavenly inheritance shall be found to be lost for ever. Gen. xxvii. 34—38. Matt. viii. 11, 12. Luke xiii. 28—30.

The spirit of the whole, in so far as it bears upon the hearers of the Gospel in general, is,—“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.” “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” The longer you continue in sin, the more inveterate will the habits of iniquity become, and the longer you stifle conviction, rebel against the light, and abuse the goodness of God, the more likely are you to have “conscience seared with a hot iron.” Death will end all your opportunities, and you know not how soon it may come; and though death should not speedily come, you may fall victims to some disorder which will utterly unfit you for reasoning or reflection. “Now, then, is the accepted time,”—“the *present* is



the day of salvation, *to-morrow* you may never see." Thus sinners are preserved from despair on the one hand, and guarded against presumption on the other.

But the apostle is addressing professing Christians, and the passage, therefore, is to be viewed as particularly, though not exclusively designed for their admonition. They are reminded here (as in chap. vi. 4—6. so far as it regards us) of the danger of rejecting that truth in which they had been instructed, and which they had acknowledged; and of practically renouncing the people of God, and re-uniting with unbelievers. The sin intended is that of wilfully apostatizing as opposed to the duty of holding fast, without wavering, the profession of the faith.

It becomes them who have "known the way of righteousness," to beware of backsliding from the faith, and acting such a profane part as to give up, with the spiritual blessing of the kingdom of Christ, the heavenly inheritance, and their portion among the church of the first-born ones, for any paltry exchange of worldly enjoyments or sensual gratifications, or from the fear of any reproaches or losses that may follow a faithful confession of the truth, 2 Pet. ii. 19—22. And as they ought each one to take heed to himself, so they ought to look diligently and watch over one another in love, that none of them be found thus foolish and unfaithful, Heb. xii. 15, 16. The same arguments drawn from the uncertainty of health and of life, which are employed to awaken the world, are used to warn Christians of the necessity of vigilance and perseverance, Luke xii. 35—40.; xxi. 34—36.

The fate of apostates will be more fearful than that of Esau; for though he lost the particular blessing connected with the birth-right, the door of the heavenly mansions was not yet shut to him, and by believing in the promised Messiah, and turning to God through him, he might have free admittance; but if a professor of religion depart from the truth, and die in a state of apostacy, the door of heaven will be shut to him for



ever ; for, says God, " If a man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

You ask me what is the meaning of Paul when he says, " I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief?" If you examine the context, you will find that he is so far from extenuating his guilt, in order to account for his obtaining mercy, that he is exhibiting his case as an instance of long-suffering goodness and abundant grace, designed as an illustration of the richness and freeness of the love of God towards sinners of the greatest magnitude. It is often necessary, in consequence of the diversity of idiom in different languages to place the words of a version in a different order from that of the languages from which we translate, as otherwise we would give a meaning to them quite different from their real import. In the present case the last clause of the verse requires to be placed before the middle one, and then it will read thus,—“ I was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious ; because I acted in ignorance and unbelief : but,” that is notwithstanding of this, “ I obtained mercy.” It appears from this, that the apostle mentions his ignorance and unbelief, not as a cause of obtaining mercy, but as the cause of his blasphemies, persecutions, and insulting treatment of the followers of Christ. It ought to be remembered that his ignorance did not arise from the want of the means of knowledge, and therefore was not invincible but wilful. He had the oracles of God, and knew that law which was a schoolmaster till the Christ came, Gal. iii. 24. He heard the discourse of Stephen,—he must have heard a great deal respecting the history, character, and claims of Jesus ; and if the Jews in general had no cloak for their sin, could his be less culpable ? Far from it,—His ignorance proceeded from enmity of heart. Speaking of the persecuting deeds of the Jews, our Lord says, that they would commit them because they knew not him that sent him ; and in praying for his murderers, he said, “ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do :” But he ex-



plains the nature of their ignorance in these words: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen, and hated both me and my Father," John xv. 21—24. The Saviour, then, is not extenuating, but accounting for their manner of treating him. It were strange, indeed, if the prayer of Jesus on the cross were employed by any to limit the divine mercy!

Now, the application of our Lord's words to the circumstances of Saul of Tarsus, is fully warranted by his history. You know when a person is completely satisfied that he is right, he generally acts with temper, but if he has felt doubts which it was not easy to dismiss, he naturally indulges in bitterness of spirit against those who would revive them to the disturbance of his peace. Does not, then, the bitterness of Paul's spirit against the disciples of Christ discover the state of his mind? That he should "verily have thought that he ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth," is by no means inconsistent with this view of his character. "Evil men wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Every new struggle against the unwelcome light of the truth, blinds the mind yet more to it, till, after repeated trials, conscience ceases to feel, and the mind rests as satisfied with its conclusions as if it had arrived at them by fair and candid inquiry. But though confirmed habits of prejudice destroy the perception of their guilt, and lead their victim to think that he, "ought to do many things against what is really the truth," they are so far from diminishing his guilt, that the guilt is, in fact, greatest when, through his persevering rebellion against light, the understanding has become the darkest, and the heart most callous.

Now was not such the nature of Paul's ignorance, and the cause of his unbelief? If the former of these was no alleviation of his crimes, surely his unbelief could not lessen them, for so far from alleviating the guilt of those evil actions, which proceed from it, there



can be no doubt that in itself it is a most heinous offence. Such was the view which Paul himself had of the subject, for in the following verse he sets love in opposition to his ignorance, as he does faith to his unbelief, when he says, "And the grace of the Lord Jesus was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus," 1 Tim. i. 14. His meaning obviously is, that the grace of the Lord Jesus was exceeding abundant with faith, bearing down his obstinate unbelief, and with love eradicating his deeply-rooted hostility.

I have said thus much to illustrate the following declaration of the apostle, in which he gives vent to his feelings of piety and gratitude, of joy and benevolence. "This is a faithful, or true, saying, and a saying worthy of the most cordial reception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am a chief, or a ringleader. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me, a chief and principal transgressor, Jesus Christ might exhibit the greatest long-suffering for a pattern to those hereafter who should believe on him to life everlasting."

It is true that God in his righteous judgment does sometimes leave men to the result of a seared conscience, obduracy of heart, and indiscernment of mind, Psalm lxxxi. 11, 12. Rom. i. 28. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12., and this is a loud call to walk in the light while it is enjoyed; but what influence ought this to have on the man who has succeeded in stifling conviction, and who can now live in utter carelessness and in sin without being alarmed? Ought not this calm to be reckoned ominous? Ought it not to be viewed as the stillness of spiritual death, even of a man twice dead? Ought he not to bestir himself, and to say, "Is it so that God has left me to my choice,—that he has given me up to my own heart's lusts,—and that I am foolishly considering myself happy and safe? What a sinful, infatuated, and wretched creature must I be? I will, like the prodigal, 'arise and go to my father.'" Let even such a



man be brought to reason and to feel thus, and let him go to God through the atonement of Christ, and then the scene between the returning prodigal and the embracing Father will again be exhibited, Jer. iii. 1, 4, 5, 12, 13, 19, 22. Ezek. xvi. 48, 51, 62, 63. Truly "this is not the manner of man"—it is that of Jehovah; and what can I say more? May you and I feel as we ought.—I am yours, &c.

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## LETTER XXII.

### GENERAL REMARKS ON RENOVATION OF CHARACTER.

The renovation of the heart the ultimate object of the Gospel—  
 Dangerous to confine the grace of God to the pardon of sin—  
 Evil of confining the attention to inward feelings—Importance of  
 uniting them with practice—A change of character the great promise  
 of the New Covenant—The divine plan of forgiveness the  
 moral means of sanctification—This change represented as a being  
 called and chosen out of the world.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING considered the doctrine of Scripture relative to that change of state which is the privilege of Christians, permit me now to advert to that change of character which is connected with it; and the necessity of which I have repeatedly mentioned.

We ought never to lose sight of the consideration, that the joyful import of the Gospel does not arise merely from the pardon it proclaims, but from its comprehending even higher blessings. These are all inseparably connected with conformity to God, and holy fellowship with him: They form the grand end of the plan of reconciliation, and the doctrine of justification through faith is the moral means by which it is gained. The grace of God appears not in lowering the standard of duty to the level of our depraved wishes, but in raising our nature to the high standard of his immutable law. To suffer us to walk in our own ways were not an act



of grace, but an abandonment of us to misery.—On the same principle, were all to which we are raised but an imperfect conformity to the law of God, then our blessedness would be as far below perfection as our obedience, and, of course, the exceeding riches of divine goodness were not in that case displayed. Here the work is imperfect, but the day is coming when we shall be completely assimilated to God, and so, perfectly happy.

It is a most dangerous notion to confine the display of divine grace to our pardon, and consequent deliverance from the wrath to come. Where it is thus confined, it is abused to the encouragement of sin. The corrupt heart imagines that it may continue in sin, that grace may abound; and that Christian liberty consists in the privilege of sinning with impunity. Sometimes it does not appear, in pleading for liberty, to indulge in gross transgressions, but in pleading against unreserved obedience, and of speaking lightly of what are termed the minor duties of life. Scandalous sins, it will allow, are to be avoided; but minute attention to every precept is not to be expected. A scrupulous exactness in the discharge of every duty is supposed to indicate a self-righteous spirit, and is met with the question, “Do you not expect to be saved by grace?” Often is this unhallowed temper connected with high pretensions to orthodoxy, and to zeal against unsound doctrine. Frequently does it appear in the habitual neglect of relative and family duties, as if religion were confined to particular times, and to public occasions, and snapped asunder the ties of relationship and domestic life.—Characters of this kind will be found boasting that they are the chosen of God, and that therefore they cannot perish. In this way they abuse the doctrine of salvation by grace. That doctrine they evidently do not understand, and do not really believe. What is the great thing in this salvation but holiness of character? What is the end of religious knowledge, but to subdue the corrupt dispositions of the heart, and to cherish and direct the principles of love to God and our brethren?



If this end is not gained, is not the man whose knowledge has puffed him up, pleasing himself with empty speculations, 1 Cor. viii. 1—3. For the truth of God we ought doubtless to be zealous; but, if we really are so, never will that be matter of laughter or supercilious contempt which excited the compassion and commanded the tears of the apostles. It is a fearful thing for professors of religion to count themselves “valiant for the truth,” when, in fact, they are gratifying the evil passions of the heart. Such characters, indeed, will often employ the strongest terms, and the most degrading epithets, when speaking of their own hearts and ways, while their self-confidence, censoriousness, and supercilious deportment towards all whose views do not on every subject quadrate with theirs, betray the fact that they have affixed such ideas to sin, when found in themselves, as to divest it of every thing blame-worthy in them. They seem to think that sin is something that works in them without their concurrence, and not a thing criminal, and therefore deeply humbling in the sight of God. By a striking figure, sin is in Scripture compared to an enemy opposed to us, in order to teach us that it tends to our ruin, and to induce us to watch against and oppose it. But if we so dwell on this figure as to forget that it is a principle within ourselves, that it springs from the inclinations of our own hearts, and that the very essence of it consists in the consent of the will, we have admitted a principle which saps the foundation both of the law and of the Gospel. It is deplorable when men can use the language of Scripture in direct opposition to its spirit.—There is reason to think that numbers who boast of their orthodoxy, and of the remarkable clearness of their views, while their spirit and deportment are far from corresponding with their profession, have deceived themselves by indulging in notions which lead to this issue. How ready are we to think ourselves rather pitiable than criminal because of our sin! Often do men act upon



principles which they would not express in words, and which they themselves do not fully perceive.

Beware, however, my dear friend, of imbibing a prejudice against any part of the truth, because the corruption of man has abused it. Individuals will, indeed, pervert the doctrines of the Gospel ; but deeply lamentable as this certainly is, I beg you to remember that still more deplorable consequences will follow any mutilated and defective representation of the truth which may be adopted from a wish to guard against abuses which might result from its full exhibition.—Such imperfect exhibitions of the truth afford a handle to the perverters of it, which they know well how to employ in their intercourse with professors of the faith, and thus “by good words and fair speeches, they deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Some who once took pleasure in stating the genuine Gospel of peace, have afterwards become afraid of doing so fully and plainly, because others have perverted it. This may have a show of wisdom ; but it betrays a want of confidence in the energy of the truth, a lurking error as to its nature, and a want of that singleness of trust in its Author which is essential to a life of faith in him. It is lamentable when, in consequence of a recent or present controversy, the truths of religion are separated, and one of them set up in opposition to another, to establish a system in which one is prominently exhibited, and the rest are cast into the shade. The opposite of error is not always the truth. There is a point between excess and deficiency—between inculcating practice without doctrine, and doctrine without practice. In order to avoid one extreme, how ready are we to go to another. This argues not only a narrowness of mind, which takes only a partial view of revelation, but also a want of proper reverence for the truths of the Almighty, which could not be intended to be opposed to each other, but all in their proper place to be received and obeyed.



You will perceive, my dear friend, that while it is the duty of a Christian to hold fast the testimony and the promise of the Gospel, and to look to them exclusively for the ground of his acceptance and his hope as a sinner, he ought to be upon his guard against self-deception. Most carefully ought he to watch over his heart and his ways, that he may ascertain the medicinal effect of the truth upon his character. It becomes him to keep his heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Self-examination is of great importance for the discovery of the evils that lurk within us, the influence of temptation on the mind, and the degree in which we are walking in the truth. When conscience tells us that we have been walking under the influence of a spirit opposed to that of the Gospel, though nothing may have been committed of which our fellow men may take cognizance, is it not evident that the truth has slipped out of our hearts? The effect of a proper hold of the truth is the subjection of the conscience to the authority of God in his word. Not only are its consolations imbibed, but its precepts, admonitions and reproofs, are received with reverence and affection. The latter no less than the former manifest the kindness and the affectionate care of our heavenly Father.

But it is cause of regret that while some are filled with presumptuous confidence, there are others who make a righteousness of nursing melancholy. As for that consolation which springs from the truth freely and indiscriminately proclaimed to the world, they care not for it: They are looking for relief not from the word of God, for this they think inadequate to their comfort, but from certain fancied good qualities in themselves. If even the most appropriate passages of Scripture should be adduced to convince them of their error, not only will they deem them inconclusive, but the attempt will excite wonder, and perhaps be treated as a proof of great ignorance of experimental religion. What an evidence of the deceitfulness of the heart! What is religious experience, but that proof or trial which Chris-



tians have of the truths of God as they pass through the various vicissitudes of life? The fact is, the characters in question are not properly convinced of sin. The inquiry with them, however it may be disguised, is at bottom this, "What lack I yet in order to procure my acceptance with God?" A question which, though it allow of deficiencies, is quite consistent with a considerable degree of self-complacency on the ground of fancied excellencies, or at least of negative goodness. Under this garb of assumed humility, there reigns the spirit of unsubdued pride.

The change of character effected by the Gospel is more than a mere external reformation, an outward attention to religious institutions, or the adoption of one class of opinions in preference to another. It is a renovation of the heart through the belief of the truth. The religion of the subject of this change is a display of the likeness of the divine perfections as revealed in the Gospel: It unites in it that humility and contrition of heart which becomes a sinner, and that holy confidence and happiness which become a friend and a child of God. His holiness consists in the dispositions which are correspondent with the spirit manifested on Calvary.

I am far from meaning that this change will be equally great in every individual. As it is produced by faith in the Gospel, so it must correspond with the degree of its strength. Nor will it be equally apparent even where faith is equally strong; for as there is a great variety in the tempers and dispositions of individuals, the religious principle has more to contend with in some than in others. Take two Christians, in whom the positive principle of piety is equally strong, the one may have to spend his strength in fighting with unamiable peculiarities of character; while the vigour of the other is more employed in such services as will make him appear to be much beyond his neighbour in religion, though upon the whole, he is not. To know what religion has



done for a man, we must consider what he would have been without it.

In considering and examining what influence the Gospel has upon us, it is wrong to confine our attention to the thoughts, the feelings, and the desires of the heart. If we are not actively engaged in obedience to the commandments of Christ, as far as we know them, it is in vain to take comfort from what we may deem warm and pious feelings. You will easily see this if you consider that, when our thoughts or feelings are not called forth or exercised by corresponding actions, it is natural for us to judge of ourselves according to the present impression on our minds. Witness the case of Peter, who, feeling warmly attached to his master, said, in the sincerity of his heart, but with great self-confidence, that he should never forsake him nor deny him, Matt. xxv. 33—35. It is easy for a man, when engaged in meditation, and still more when under the excitement of the accompaniments of a public assembly, and a powerful appeal to the heart by the truth, to feel in such a way as to become persuaded that nothing surely can ever damp him or turn him aside from the right path; who yet is no sooner assailed by temptation than he falls. Now, when corresponding deeds or sacrifices are called for, and we do not perform them, it is evident that our hearts have deceived us.

But, on the other hand, as the same works may proceed from very different motives, we ought not to confine our attention to actions. It is the relation of actions to divine truth, and the nature of the principles from which they proceed, that determines them to be good. A man, you know, may give all his goods to feed the poor, and even his body to be burned, and yet be destitute of love, 1 Cor. xiii. 3. It becomes us then, to examine without reserve, both our actions, and the principles from which they flow. It is quite unscriptural to decry warmth of feeling to the exaltation of external deeds, for surely the fervour of our feelings ought to correspond with the excellence, grandeur, and



importance of the objects with which we are conversant. On the other hand, it is equally unscriptural to decry deeds of obedience to the exaltation of internal emotions and sensations ; for, as it is only in as far as actions are known to proceed from faith in the Gospel, that they manifest genuine religion, so it is only in as far as the excitement of our feelings produces Christian practices that they are proved to proceed from the truth. The first Christians were full at once of feeling and of energy ; their minds burned within them ; but it was when the truths of the Scripture were unfolded to them, and the warmth which was thus enkindled led to constant and laborious activity, Luke xxiv. 32. They were not afraid to encourage those inward feelings which necessarily result from the knowledge of the truth, as if they would interfere with active obedience, for they found that the joy of the Lord was their strength ; and they united the great principles of the kingdom of God, which are "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," Rom. xiv. 17.

To live by faith is to have the judgment, the affections, and the whole life regulated by a habitual governing regard to the doctrines of the Gospel, and to the invisible realities which are revealed to us in Scripture. Unbelief is proved by the want of the emotions or actions which correspond with the objects proposed to our belief. Thus, because Lot's sons-in-law believed him not when he warned them of the impending danger, they felt no fear of it, nor used any means to escape it : And such of the Egyptians as believed not the declaration of Moses respecting the plague of the hail, regarded not the word of the Lord, and left their servants and cattle in the field. Noah, on the other hand, believed the threatening respecting the flood, and feeling, in consequence, the corresponding emotion of fear, he prepared an ark. Gideon was encouraged by the promise of success, for in the confidence of it he attacked and discomfited his enemies. The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, believed the promises : and therefore



embraced them, and practically confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. In like manner, faith in the Gospel will still produce such emotions and feelings in regard to the character of God, the grace and condescension of the Saviour, the character and condition of man, and the comparative importance of the present and the invisible world, as will hallow the affections, will raise above the fear of suffering, and will impart a character of decision and dignity to the mind. See in the Apostle Paul how the most deep and warm emotions and feelings were united with patient suffering, constant self-denial, and the most indefatigable exertion.

We are in great danger, however, of deceiving ourselves respecting our religious feelings and emotions in a way similar to that in which the subjects of an ill-regulated sensibility deceive themselves in regard to benevolence. An interesting account of human wretchedness will excite in the latter a kind of pleasurable sympathetic emotions which soothe the heart, and deceive it into a persuasion of its tenderness, but which are very different from genuine and enlightened benevolence. Accordingly, such characters are not the first to enter into the abodes of wretchedness, to encounter the painful and offensive concomitants of misery, or to devote time and thought, labour and attention, to the victims of distress.

Now, there is a possibility of living in a world of romance likewise, in relation to religion. Some do nothing but dwell on the varieties of their frames and feelings, to the neglect of those deeds of self-denied labour, and those practical fruits of righteousness, by abounding in which Christians habitually adorn the Gospel of Christ. They forget, that if the impressions made upon us do not excite us to that obedience which the Saviour has enjoined, they have not profited our hearts. I need not again say, that warmth of feeling ought not to be decried. He who does not in some measure feel, has not known the truth. What so fitted to impress the heart and to animate the feelings as the doctrines of the



cross? The degree of their warmth, and the manner of expressing them, will vary in persons differently constituted, even with the same knowledge of the truth: but yet a measure of suitable feeling will in all cases be excited where the glory of the truth is discerned.

But, my dear friend, the feelings I now refer to are not produced by the contemplation of the truth. Often are the subjects of them quite listless when the interesting and sublime, but yet sober and solid doctrines of the Bible, are the topics of discourse. Instead of endeavouring to advance from first principles to perfection, or to a full and comprehensive acquaintance with the truth, they are content with a few common-place ideas. There is a strange vagueness of expression, a want of precision and justness of conception, in all that they say, as if they rested in mere words, without having attached to them any definite ideas. Now, even though the words we employ should in themselves embody the most important truths, if they are not accompanied with definite conceptions in our minds they cannot excite vigorous sensations. If, therefore, notwithstanding of this, powerful sensations are produced, it cannot have been by the truth. Obedience to the Saviour, I would remind you, is the test of all right feeling towards him—"Ye are my friends," says he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." In like manner we are told, that "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." We are more ready to be deceived in regard to our affection for an unseen character than for one that is seen; and hence we are told, that our love to God is to be manifested by love to his people, 1 John iv. 12, 20. But as we are likewise apt to be deceived in regard to our love to *them*, because we may love them, not because they are Christians, but for some inferior reason, we are guarded against deception as to this, by being told, "that by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments," 1 John v. 2, 3. You see then, that we are guarded against mistaken views of our internal *emotions* on the one hand,



and mistaken views of our *actions* on the other, both as they regard God and our brethren.\* Some are more apt to be deceived in regard to the former, and others in regard to the latter ; and the same person may at different times err with respect to both. There is, therefore, great wisdom in the cautions of Scripture, by which we are told, “ This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left,” Isa. xxx. 21,

I beg you, my dear friend, to remember, that it must be vain to look for the fruits of conversion to God before going as we are to the Saviour ; for it is in believing in his finished work that we become new creatures. You ought likewise to remember, that it is a mistake to look for *great* effects from faith, when it has just commenced. The faith of a Christian may at first be very feeble ; the degree of his light may be but an obscure dawning ; and if his views of the Gospel are in many respects indistinct, the result will be small in proportion. But yet this infant faith will produce a corresponding measure of obedience, and will, besides this, be itself increased by obedience. The way to obtain brighter and larger discoveries of the truth is, not to look exclusively at truth as if it were an abstract thing, but to act up to what we already know, for “ to him that hath, more shall be given,” Luke viii. 18. It is clear, also, from the nature of things, that the way to increase faith and to purify the heart, is not to wait in indolent inactivity, as if, independently of the use of appropriate means, the principle will get more and more vigorous ; for it is a law in nature, that the exercise of a principle tends to strengthen it. Besides, this were to neglect present duty to the dishonour of God, however we might seek to justify our inactivity, by pleading that we were waiting for great ability for obedience. Never ought it to be forgotten, that the career of that obedience which flows from faith, however weak, cannot be too soon begun. The least degree of faith in the Gospel will so far purify the heart, and send forth the streams of a holy



deportment. Some seem to bend their whole attention to faith as an abstract thing; and are so occupied, as they think, in increasing it, as to forget that the great value of it arises from its influence in exciting us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, as the means of fitting us for the services and the joys of the heavenly state.

This holy character is far from being a merely secondary thing—it is, in fact, the great and ultimate object of the work of Christ. It is not to be put in the back ground, as if, though a very good thing, it occupied only a subordinate place. Some, without intending it, have thus misplaced it. They speak of it chiefly as an evidence of faith in Christ, and of their consequent interest in his work. It does indeed manifest faith in him, but does so because it naturally proceeds from the belief of the truth. It has in itself a value besides the evidence it affords of the reality of our faith, and a value higher than this evidence, just as the health of the body has a value in itself independent of the evidence it affords of the excellence of the food by which it is cherished, and of the goodness of our appetite.

In the new covenant God promises to put his law in the inward parts of his people, and to write it on their hearts; that he will be to them a God, and that they shall be to him a people: and that they shall all know him from the least to the greatest of them, *for*, says he, I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more, Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. The promise of a change of heart, you see, is mentioned first, because this change is the ultimate though not the only object of the plan of mercy. You will also observe that the last promise exhibits both the ground on which the other promises are made, and the *means* by which they are fulfilled. God does not say, “I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more, for I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts,”—but “I will put my law in their inward parts,



and write it in their hearts ; *for* I will *forgive* their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." This last promise is a promise, not merely of forgiveness, but of forgiveness through a propitiation. This is evidently the interpretation given of the passage in Heb. x. 15—18. The remembrance of sin intended is the *judicial* remembrance of it, in order to punishment, or by requiring additional sacrifices of expiation. The promise includes then, the perfect and everlasting removal of guilt through the one offering of Christ, as the ground on which all the other promises are to be fulfilled.\* But this promise exhibits also the *means* by which the other promises are fulfilled. We are brought into a new relation to God, as our God, through the mediation of Christ ; it is by the manifestation of the divine character in his work, that we come to know God ; and it is by the revelation of the glory of God, in the wonderful means of our redemption, that the heart is attracted to him, and becomes the seat of that love which is the fulfilling of his law. Such is the revelation of the union of justice and mercy in his sacrifice, and of the character of God as a righteous judge and a kind parent, that when understood and believed, it produces love to him who has so loved us, and love to mankind for his sake. Now, as the sum of the law is love to God and our neighbour, it follows, that when we are thus influenced by faith in the atonement to the love of God and of man, the divine law is put in our inward parts, and written in our hearts. Thus, in the covenant of God there is provision made, both for a change in our state and a change in our character.

These two blessings correspond with the twofold view given of sanctification in Scripture, where it is used in a legal or sacrificial sense, and also in a moral sense. In the former it is generally used in the epistle to the Hebrews, where it means, that by the atonement Christ hath expiated the sins of his people, and consecrated them

\* See a Survey of the Old and New Covenants, Chap. ii. Sec. ii.



to God, as his peculiar property, Heb. ii. 11. ; ix. 13, 14. ; x. 14. ; and xiii. 12. In this sense, it is not progressive. When used in a moral sense, it signifies, to be made holy, by being created after the image of God in holiness and righteousness, Ephesians iv. 23, 24. This work is progressive, and keeps pace with our progress in the knowledge, faith, and obedience of the gospel, Ephesians v. 26, 27. 2 Thess. iv. 1, 9, 10.

The blessings of forgiveness, and renovation of heart, though in themselves distinct, invariably go together. In illustration of this, allow me to refer you to the Mosaic Law, which figuratively marked both the connexion and the date of these invaluable benefits. Moses, when speaking of the kindness of God to Israel, in having separated them from the rest of the nations, and taken them into a peculiar relation to himself, says that "the Lord had chosen them to be a people unto himself above all people upon the face of the earth." Now in these words he obviously refers to that separation which had been effected in time ; for he represents it as the fulfilment of the divine oath to Abraham, and as having been begun in their redemption from Egyptian bondage, with a view to its being completed, when, as a kingdom of priests, they should dwell in the land of Canaan within the inclosure of his law. Deut. vii. 6—8. ; Exod. xix. 4, 5, 6. As a people separated from the world as to privilege, they were also to be separated as to character, and they were accordingly forbidden to walk as did other nations, and commanded to walk as became a sacred society—"ye shall be holy unto me," says God, "for I the Lord your God am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be mine," Lev. xx. 26.

Now the separation of Israel was typical of a legal separation as to state, and a moral separation as to character, between the church of Christ and the world.—Christians are accordingly described as distinguished by those blessings and qualities of which the privileges and the services of Israel were figures. 1 Pet. ii. 9. They



are "a chosen generation," inasmuch as they are a family derived from one stock, being born of God through the incorruptible seed of his word, and thus distinguished from the mass of mankind as his children. They are "a royal priesthood," as the younger brethren of Christ, who "is a priest upon his throne," and because they are consecrated to God by his blood, and by the anointing of his holy Spirit; they are "an holy nation," because separated to God by the sacrifice of Jesus, (Heb. ix. 13, 14.; x. 14.) and because they are sanctified by the implantation of holy principles, tempers, and dispositions of heart, (1 Cor. vi. 11, 19, 20.): and they are a peculiar, or a people for a purchase, and therefore a peculiar treasure unto God, because they are redeemed from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin, by the ransom of the blood of Christ, and accordingly they are called "his purchased possession," Matt. xx. 28. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. Ephes. i. 14.

These privileges are bestowed, and these holy principles implanted, "that they may show forth the praises," or, by bearing his image, exhibit in their whole spirit and deportment "the perfections of Him who hath thus called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." Thus a change of state and a change of character go together:—The former is bestowed chiefly for the sake of the latter, and both are designed to produce that hallowed conduct in Christians by which the truth is embodied, and the image of God is displayed to the world.

In the passage to which I now refer you, the apostle is speaking of relations into which we are brought, of privileges conferred on us, and of a character formed in us, on our believing in Christ. It is only then that we are declared to have a particular interest in the blessings of redemption. Accordingly, the apostle represents the whole of these blessings as coeval in their bestowment. And he adds, what corroborates this, "Which in time past were not a people, but are now



the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

We should beware of confounding the purposes of God with their accomplishment. As his purpose to create the world, and the actual creation of it, were infinitely far from coeval, so his purpose concerning the new and spiritual creation, and its actual existence, ought never to be treated as if they were of equal date. The purpose of God secured the advent of the Saviour, and the accomplishment of his expiatory work secures the bestowment of the blessings of his grace : but till men believe in the atonement they are children of wrath, being declared by the Scriptures to be heirs of condemnation, Eph. ii. 3. John iii. 18. When sinners believe in the Saviour, they are considered as one with him, and are therefore treated as though they had died when he did, and had been raised and glorified as He was ; inasmuch as they obtain the benefit of His death and His glory so far as it can be obtained in the present state, Ephes. ii. 4—9. Rom. vi. 8—10. But a man can no more be actually justified while in unbelief, than he can be actually and personally glorified in heaven before he has left this world. The Scriptures, accordingly, when speaking of the justification of such as were to come to the knowledge of the truth, represent it as future. And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. "So then, they which be of faith," that is, those who have believed, are blessed as was Abraham, Gal. iii. 8, 9. To make a thing consist in the mere manifestation of it, or in a persuasion of its existence, is utterly inadmissible ; for a thing must exist before it can appear, and there can be no warranted belief of a thing unless it be true before our persuasion of it. The inward feelings of an injured ruler towards the criminal, are in themselves neither condemnation, nor forgiveness. The former is his pass-



ing sentence, according to the law, and the latter is the reversal of that sentence. And on the same principle, the love of God as existing in his heart, ought not to be confounded with the expression of that love in the actual forgiveness and acceptance of sinners.

The subjects of that change of mind, which is effected by the Gospel are thereby separated from this evil world, and hence it is sometimes expressed by their being said to be called and chosen from the kingdom of the wicked one, into the kingdom of Christ. Thus our Lord told his disciples, that the reason why they were hated of the world was, that they were not of it, but chosen by Him out of it, John xv. 19. Now, that which provoked the hatred of the world must have been a thing which was visible and tangible, as it were, and not something hid among the secrets of God. He must, therefore, refer to their having been by conversion to God called out of the world by a change in their principles and character, which change, as it appeared in its practical result, drew down upon them the hatred of the wicked. It is not any particular sentiments held by Christians in regard to the divine purposes, that, considered in themselves, provoke the hostility of the world ; for philosophers are allowed to speculate as they may on subjects connected with the different theories which have been held in regard to liberty and necessity, without provoking a spirit of the kind. It is the humbling implications of the Gospel, its condemnation of the ways of men, its holy and spiritual nature, and its sanctifying effect on believers, which excite the opposition of mankind.

Generally speaking, the world will allow professors of religion to adhere to what doctrinal sentiments they may, provided they conform to their spirit, maxims, and ways. Hold the truth as a matter of mere speculation, and not of practical interest, and reprove not their ways by what resembles God, and reminds them of him, by what condemns their pursuits and disturbs their peace ; and though they may at times smile at the



fancied dogmas which are retained, they will not greatly oppose. It is the truth as embodied in the holy deportment of Christians,—in their abandonment of the follies, vanities, and sins of this world,—in their practical separation from its pursuits, and in their conscientious adherence to all that can cherish and manifest the power of godliness, that calls forth the hatred of the ungodly. By these practical means, as well also as by words, do they testify of the works of the world, that they are evil. Nor is it merely the practices of those who make no pretensions to religion that they thus condemn, but the empty form of godliness that is kept by many who seek to unite the service of God with that of mammon. For such things as these are they hated.

The apostle Paul, in 2 Thess. ii. 9—13. when speaking of some who, though they had long heard, and even professed faith in the Gospel, had never received the love of the truth, that is, had never cordially embraced it, expresses his happiness in the contrast, which was evident in the Christians in Thessalonica, who had from the beginning received it as the word of God. The former held the truth rather as a matter of mere speculation than of practical and eternal interest,—it never sat easily upon them,—its holy nature galled their sinful hearts,—they wished for a system which would reconcile the practice of sin with a profession of piety, and the hope of escaping hell, and getting to heaven at last ; and in this state they were prepared to receive any representation of the Gospel, however false, that met their desires. In this awful and hardened condition God permitted, in righteous judgment the most erroneous doctrines to be taught, and to such delusions they gave themselves up, and so perished in their sins. But the apostle thanked God that his brethren had not thus continued to hear the truth without cordially embracing it, but had, on the contrary, through the grace of God, been chosen or separated from the world, unto the salvation of Christ ; which is effected through sanc-



tification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. The Spirit of God had opened their minds to perceive the glory of the Gospel, and had changed their hearts ; and so separated them from the world, and called them into the holy and blessed kingdom of the Saviour.

Peter addresses his Christian brethren as “elect,” or chosen, and called out of the world, and brought into the fellowship of the kingdom of Christ, by sanctification or regeneration of the Spirit, in order to obedience, and through the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, in order to a change of state ; according to the foreknowledge of God, 1 Peter i. 2.

There are two great fellowships or communities in the world :—At the head of the one is Christ, and at the head of the other, Satan. All mankind naturally belong to the latter. The members of the former have been called out of the kingdom of the wicked one, for the purpose of being conformed to the character of God ; and hence are required to be holy, as he who hath called them is holy. As a pardoned people, through the blood of sprinkling, they are separated from the mass of mankind, who are all in a state of condemnation. That truth, through the faith of which they are thus accepted, is accompanied by the influence of the Divine Spirit, causing it to attract the faculties of the mind, and to mould them into its own likeness ; so that they are separated, not only as to state, but also in regard to character, from “the kingdom of darkness.” The objects which engage the subjects of the latter kingdom impart to them their own fleeting nature, and imprint on them their own image of death and vanity. And the truth believed by the subjects of Christ dwells within them, and leaves its impressions and resemblance ; and thus are the two distinguished.

Indeed, the means and the agency necessary to the commencement of this work, are also necessary to its progress and completion. Look, then, with a devout mind to the Father of light, from whom cometh all that is good, and nothing that is morally evil.—And



may you feel the influence of the powerful motives to obedience which are concentrated in the plan of redemption. I am, &c.

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## LETTER XXIII.

### PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NECESSITY OF FAITH, AND OF THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT.

Faith the medium of forgiveness—Connected with salvation, because it brings under the influence of the truth. The word of God the instrument by which the Spirit acts—His influences the fruit of pure Grace.—The proper use of the doctrine.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You must often have reflected on the necessity of faith in order to salvation, and on the divine influence by which faith is produced. These are subjects prominently exhibited in Scripture, and worthy of the most serious attention. With a view to aid your meditations, allow me to suggest to you some general reflections, bearing particularly on certain practical mistakes in regard to them.

Man fell through disbelieving the declarations of God, and believing the falsehoods of the tempter; and we are saved through the belief of a truth, confirmed by evidence from heaven, and comprehending all that is necessary for us in our present situation. There is, therefore, in some respects a correspondence between the way in which sin was introduced and that in which we are delivered from its influence.

It is worthy, therefore, of particular attention, that though the death of Christ is the ground on which the blessing of forgiveness is bestowed, the faith of the divine testimony regarding it is the medium through which it is communicated. It is easy to see how forgiveness is connected with the death of Christ, because it has magnified and made honourable the law of God,



- and has made atonement for sin.—But why connect it with faith in it? Had all intended been our forgiveness, there had been no great necessity for connecting it with faith, for as the atonement is perfectly finished without us, faith cannot add to it. There is, however, a fitness of wisdom in the appointment that whosoever by believing in Christ becomes united to Him, and sets his seal as it were to what was done by him, when he expiated the sins of many, shall have his work reckoned to him as though it were his own. But the great object in view is to deliver us from sin itself, and to bring us to love the true character of God, to delight in him, to enjoy what he enjoys, and to place our happiness in the enjoyment of his favour and fellowship; in doing his will, knowing and admiring his excellencies, and in being assimilated to him. Faith, then, is connected with forgiveness, chiefly because our spiritual health can be obtained in no other way. However important and glorious the Gospel is in itself, it cannot change our views and principles unless it be believed. We cannot love God in his true character, without knowing and believing what he has revealed himself to be. Obedience may, indeed, be yielded under the impulse of fear, or from a regard to character in the world; but this cannot be acceptable,—it must spring from love.

It is not enough that we love a God of our own imagination, which is not to love God, but to love an idol of our own framing. We must be brought to love the character of God, as revealed by himself; and to this we cannot be brought without faith in the revelation he has given in the Gospel. We cannot believe in this exhibition of the divine character till we know it,—we cannot know it in its real glory without loving and admiring it,—and we cannot love and admire it without imitating it; and thus it is that we become like to it. There is nothing mystical in this, it is quite analogous to what we see in other things every day. The influence of faith in divine truth is agreeable to the influence of belief in common life. In every case faith is a



principle producing some practical effect, and not something abstract, suspending activity. We are diligent because we believe that this is the way to success—we labour for knowledge, because we believe it will yield pleasure or profit—we use medicines when sick, because we believe it will remove or alleviate our disorder—we are attached to a friend, because we believe in his excellencies, and that he is attached to us—we esteem a person of worth, because we are persuaded of the excellencies of his character and deportment—we fear when we believe we are in danger ; and in like manner we are grateful to God when we believe in his love to us ; and we esteem and admire the wondrous and delightful excellencies of his character when the revelation of his kindness and glory, as exhibited in the Gospel, is believed.

True holiness in its principle, and in its result—good works, is the fruit and the token of faith in the Gospel. Its doctrines are in themselves practical, though such as are blind to their true glory may treat them, as they do, as matters of mere speculation. There were men of old who said that they were fraught with the pernicious sentiment, that evil may be done that good may come ; but this was opposed most decidedly, and the holy tendency of the truth most clearly evinced, Rom. iii. 9. ; and vi. 15—22. It is the power of God to salvation from the dominion of sin, because therein is God's method of justification by faith revealed, in order to be believed, Rom. i. 16, 17. Acts. xv. 9. Such is its nature, that when believed, a mighty influence is exerted on the heart, by which it triumphs over that rebellious principle which rules in our nature. He who believes it has his eyes opened to its unutterable loveliness ; so that while his affections are captivated, corruption receives its death-blow, and sinks beneath the power of the cross.

It is evident from this, that in the very nature of things the blessings of salvation must be limited to such as believe in Christ ; for in no other way can the



mind be conformed to the character of God, and so fitted for the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. The limitation, then, is not an arbitrary one, so far as a change of mind is concerned: And even the connection between pardon and faith, though in certain respects arbitrary, is not so in all. This connection being admirably fitted to illustrate the important truth, that salvation is not of works of law, but of pure unmerited favour, Rom. iv. 16. ; and so to exhibit the nature of the plan of reconciliation, is of course calculated to bring us under the transforming influence of the great object of our belief. We say of a gift,—you may have it by asking for it, or by taking it; and the Gospel says, God is already well pleased in Christ, so you may have the benefit of his mercy, by believing this declaration of it, 2 Cor. v. 18—21. Luke xiv. 17. ; and thus it operates on the heart.

This change of mind is what the Scriptures mean by *regeneration*. In this great work the Spirit of God is the agent, and the word of God is the instrument, John iii. 5. Titus iii. 5. 1 Peter i. 23. It is equally unscriptural to affirm, that men may be regenerated without the Spirit, as to say, that they may be so without the truth; for it still remains true, that, “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord (in the Scripture sense of the words), but by the Holy Ghost. If any obey the truth, they do so through the Spirit, 1 Cor. xii. 3. 1<sup>st</sup> Pet. i. 22. On the mode of his operations the Scriptures are silent; but whatever may be the way in which he disposes the mind to receive the truth, by operating directly upon the heart, it is only by the impressions produced in us by it that we feel ourselves affected. His influence is employed to make the truth bear upon the mind,—to bring it and the mind into direct contact, as it were; and to fix the mind upon it, and to keep it fixed till its import, nature and excellence are discerned; and till, by our thus perceiving its evidence, the faith of the heart is commanded, and the whole character of the soul is changed by it.—Divine influ-



ence is employed in connection with means, and acts simultaneously with them. Though in itself distinct from the means, and though direct in its operations, it yet so accompanies the means, that its subject is conscious of no change, but through the instrumentality of the truth.

How often does it happen, that on believing the Gospel, and finding himself the subject of new views and sensations, the individual does not at the time think of the influence whence they originated, but, on the contrary, is ready to imagine that any person, if he would but look into the Bible, must see what he sees so plainly in it. He is conscious of ideas suggested to him by the word of God, and he thinks that if others but heard what so deeply affects him, they would be equally affected. I am far from meaning that such a person is ignorant of the depravity of the heart, or of the necessity of divine influence arising from this ; I mean only, that at the time he is so much struck with what he sees, that for the moment he reflects not on the influence accompanying it ; and, in the ardour of his heart, he seeks to point every one to it, in the hope of their yielding to it likewise.—Thus felt and acted the amiable coadjutor of Luther ; but he says, “ I soon found that old Adam was too strong for young Melanethon.” The Christian, though he slackens not his diligence in instructing others, learns to look more to God for his Spirit, and to labour with more singleness of dependence upon him. While he rejoices, as he feels from time to time the effect of the truth, he remembers the words of his Lord to Peter, “ Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven,” Matt. xvi. 17. He is at the same time convinced that nothing but the depravity of his own heart kept him from discerning it sooner. The Spirit, as the Saviour has said, convinces him of having sinned in not believing before, John xvi. 8, 9. He is now astonished at the forbearance and long-suffering which God exercised towards him, and is impressed with the guilt of having



so long remained insensible to such a display of love and of excellence. Not that unbelief is the only sin of which the Spirit convinces men, for a conviction of the guilt of unbelief supposes a conviction of the evil of all that led to it. But as our Lord's object was to state the *ultimate object* of the Spirit's work, and that by which it is *distinguished* from the mere effect of the operations of natural conscience, he speaks of it under this comprehensive view.

Now, as the blind man, whose eyes were opened, though he could not explain the nature of light and of vision, nor could he tell how it was that Jesus opened his eyes, could yet say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see," John ix. 35. So when the decisive evidence of the Gospel shines into the heart, by the enlightening influence of the Spirit, it produces a sensible conviction of its truth, though the nature of the influence employed we do not understand. We do not see the wind itself, but we see and feel its effects.—"So it is as to every one who is born of the Spirit," John iii. 7, 8. The effects of the divine influence are seen and felt, but the mode of it is inexplicable.

The recovery of a sinner from the dominion of sin, is what mere human agency never can effect; but he is not out of the reach of the agency of God. We can easily conceive that the Almighty can touch the spring of volition, and without interfering with the laws of mind and of agency, secure a complete change of choice and of conduct. The energy of the Spirit on the mind, combining with truth, gives efficiency to its moral fitness. He thus operates on the heart in a way of holy influence, which, while it effectually secures the obedience of the will, offers not the least violence to its natural freedom of choice, but persuasively inclines it under the influence of an enlightened judgment, in perfect accordance with the properties of a rational being. No new faculties are imparted, which were in fact to destroy the identity of the man. To believe the Gospel



is perfectly suitable to our natural faculties, for we are by no means under the fatal necessity of making God a liar.

Nothing is taught by the Spirit of God, but what the Scriptures already contain, and what we should see there without his special influence, were we not depraved in heart, and hostile to the pure and humbling doctrines of the cross. Holy creatures instantly receive and act upon whatever God is pleased to reveal to them; and therefore the necessity of the special influences of Heaven, in order to the right perception of the Gospel, does not arise from any deficiency in its evidence, or from any obscurity in its statements, but entirely from the depravity of the human heart, John iii.

19. The want of a holy inclination cannot excuse unbelief, for in the want of this inclination the radical evil consists. If inclination were the rule of duty, it would follow, that the more a man is disinclined to it the less is his obligation to perform it. This would destroy every idea of sin, for men always perform as much service as they are inclined to; and if no more can be required, they of course have not sinned. Now, if they have not sinned, there can be no necessity for an atonement, and the assistance of the Spirit is unnecessary likewise, since, without his special aid, men will do all that they are inclined to do; and if nothing more be required, why give the Spirit to produce it? Does not this notion, then, sap the foundation both of the law and the Gospel? According to this view of the ground of obligation, the less depraved a man is, the more criminal is he; because, upon this principle, in order to constitute a bad action, there must have been some good disposition by which it was performed; and then only those things are criminal which were in some respects inadvertent, or done with reluctance; for if the individual had so hardened himself in wickedness, as to have no compunction remaining, and if the deed were done with deliberate premeditation, and from malignant design, then, as it proceeded from unmixed depravity,



it seems it could not be criminal, because moral power, that is, some good inclination, is necessary to moral obligation ! Can any thing be more absurd, or more contradictory to every principle of sound morality than this ?

Would any man, in a matter that regarded his worldly interest, say of a person who had defrauded him, that as he had no inclination to be honest, he was not bound to be so ; or, of a slothful servant, that as he had an aversion to labour, he was under no obligation to be diligent ? It is passing strange, that men should apply rules of judgment to the concerns of religion, which they would blush to adduce in an earthly affair !

This view of the subject is essential to proper impressions of the depravity of man, for there can be no depravity in the insensibility of a piece of inert matter. The opposite view is inconsistent with all feelings of penitence, because it furnishes a plea and an excuse for transgression, for the sinner may say I could not help it. It destroys also every idea of the rich grace of God. It is no great matter to save the merely helpless and impotent, but what a display of grace is afforded in the salvation of such as were the willing and the determined enemies of God and of all that is good !

We should beware, on the one hand, of the error of those who deny an obligation to believe where there is no will to do so, and on the other that of those who maintain that divine influence upon the mind is necessary to render a man accountable for his unbelief.—These extremes, it will be seen, meet in a very remarkable manner, and both charge the guilt of unbelief and sin upon God.

To advert for a moment to the former, it is true, that, in point of fact, no sinner will believe till his heart is changed ; but this does not affect the argument, for the question is not, whether man *will* believe and obey, but whether he *could*, if he were inclined to do so ; and of course, whether his unbelief is criminal or not. It is to no purpose to say, that as man has no inclination to use his natural faculties in this way, it



comes to the same thing as if he had no physical power, for there is an essential difference between the character of a servant who would do a piece of service if he *could* and that of one who could do it if he *would*, but ye does it not. It is the fact, that the latter is the case with mankind, that will strike unbelievers speechless at the bar of judgment.

With regard to the latter error, it is more specious in appearance, but more inconsistent than the former. It allows that man is depraved, and destitute of all moral power to obey, but affirms that divine grace imparts to him a sufficiency of moral power to render him accountable, and the fit subject of rewards and punishment. But if this grace be the ground of accountability, then without it they cannot be guilty; and if not guilty, what need have they of the grace of God to save them? According to this, grace, instead of being favour to the unworthy, is rather an act of equity to the unfortunate. The depravity of man is by this made at once the cause and the effect of the grace of God. This error would be utterly exploded, did men consider the proper grounds of accountability, and the difference between natural and moral power.

It ought never to be forgotten, then, that the disposition produced by the Spirit of God is nothing more than every rational creature ought at all times to possess; for it must always be our present duty to love God supremely,—to receive what he declares, and to obey what he commands. Wherever natural faculties are imparted, and means for and freedom in their exercise are enjoyed, there the proper grounds of obligation are laid to the extent of those faculties and means. However much the inclinations of man are opposed to his duty, the latter is not more than commensurate with the faculties and advantages he enjoys; but to this extent his duty certainly goes, whatever be the state of his mind. The evidence which accompanies, and is contained in the Gospel, undoubtedly imposes an obligation on all who hear it, to believe it, without any re-



gard to their inclinations, John xv. 22, 24. Ezek. ii. 3—7. ; iii. 10, 11. Accordingly we find, that what is promised by God, as the God of grace, in one part of Scripture, is required by him as a Lawgiver in another, Jer. xxxii. 40. 1 Sam. xii. 24. Ezek. xxxvi. 26. and xviii. 31.

Ought we not, then, my dear friend, to imitate those who, knowing that they were naturally prone to neglect or disobey the will of their God, turned his precepts into prayer, and pleaded that he would, according to his promise, work in them what his law required, Ps. li. 10. and cxix. 4, 5. The conviction that the influence of the Holy Spirit is a matter of pure favour, and not the ground of our obligation to conform to the will of God, will preserve us on the one hand from that spirit of self-justification, which would throw the blame of our sins upon God, and on the other, from that spirit of self-sufficiency which would induce us to trust to ourselves, instead of constantly relying on the promises of heavenly aid. The former is calculated to lull the heart into a false feeling of security, while indulging in impenitence and unbelief, but the latter is not less dangerous, for it leads us to act as if independent of the grace so freely exhibited in the Gospel. The true Christian temper will induce us to improve all the doctrines and promises, the precepts and exhortations of Scripture, in the confidence of obtaining in answer to prayer, the aid of the Spirit of God. We shall feel prompted to pray, by the overwhelming thought, that as such is the natural opposition of our heart to the God of all goodness, to his holy law, to his method of redemption through Christ, and to the character which it is his object to produce in us, that nothing short of almighty power could have brought it to embrace the Gospel; and such its insensibility to all the melting attractions of the cross of Christ, that nothing less than energy divine could have softened it, so the same influence is still requisite to maintain the work which has thus been begun. This is a thought which, when



properly considered, must fill with the deepest contrition. What can render us more unworthy of the divine favour, than such a temper of heart as this? When really convinced that such is our natural character, the necessity of divine influence will no longer be mentioned in order to palliate sin, or to excuse sloth and unbelief, but will be viewed as the ground of deep humiliation and penitence. No more will we speak of our inability, or rather our unwillingness to believe in Christ, with a cold and an unimpressed heart, but with shame and self-loathing; while we bless God for the change effected by his grace.

We shall thus be preserved in our Christian course, from the injurious notion that we ought to feel as if mere passive instruments in the hand of the Spirit—a notion which destroys every motive to self-government and activity. There is a connection established between means and ends, Acts xx. 32. The operations of the Spirit are not like those physical operations of nature that do not admit or require any agency on our part, but which go on as well when we are asleep as when we are awake. The Scriptures never lose sight of the free agency of man, or of his obligation conscientiously to exercise the whole of his faculties, 1 Cor. x. 15. Mark viii. 17, 18. They always address us as rational creatures, and in the doctrines of the Gospel, they present us with the most powerful stimulus to exertion, 2 Tim. ii. 7—14. When we are first converted to God, the influence of his Spirit is employed to make the truth and motives contained in them to bear upon the mind; and, in like manner, his influence continues to be employed in sanctifying us; for the operation of motives is the only casual reason of the actions of free agents, and as such we are always treated in the dispensations of Heaven. The Spirit of God deals with us as intelligent creatures, and imperceptibly excites us to consider and receive the declarations of his word, without our being generally able to distinguish between his operations and those of our own faculties. Now, as it is



- therefore wrong in any man to suppose that it is proper to delay believing in Christ, till divine influence is distinctly felt, as the mariner waits for the flowing of the tide ; so it is likewise wrong for a Christian to neglect the duties of his place and circumstances, till he feels, as he thinks, some impulse from Heaven, exciting him to obedience. It is easy to start difficulties on a subject like this ; but let Christians beware of that vain jangling, which would lead the simple-hearted to perplex themselves with subjects which belong rather to the science of the philosophy of the human mind than to the doctrine of Jesus. If not upon their guard against this, they may be led into a field of speculation which, in consequence of our ignorance, has no limits. In vain do we seek to lay our hand on those secret springs which, in the first instance, move to spiritual life and activity. What human perspicacity can discern that hidden work which unites the sovereign influence of the aids of grace with the fullest scope for the active faculties of man. It is for us to unite constant watchfulness and fervent prayer, and the utmost activity in duty, with simplicity of dependence on God. The husbandman knows that God gives the increase, but he does not expect to reap where he has not sown. It were foolish to complain of not profiting by the word of God, if we never set ourselves to ponder it, for it does not operate as a charm. Prayer, when unaccompanied by corresponding activity, is a trifling with Heaven ; and activity without prayer, and a sense of dependence on God, is a practical denial of his character and of his testimony concerning man.—I am, &c.



## LETTER XXIV.

### ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND RENOVATION OF CHARACTER.

The natural fitness of the truth to renovate the mind—Faith a principle producing action—The truth believed the cure of the soul—The importance of scriptural sentiments—The sanctifying influences of the doctrines of the Cross.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN my last letter I suggested some practical reflections on the work of the Spirit ; permit me now to call your attention more particularly to the connection between faith and renovation of character.

The truth of God is the instrument by which the Spirit operates ; and it is by producing faith in it that he makes its influence to bear upon us.

It is of great importance to remember that there is a natural fitness in divine truth, to produce the effect designed by it. If we are forgetful of God, and presuming that all is well with us, what so fitted to awaken us from this dream, as the voice of God declaring that all have sinned, and that judgment is at hand. Are we brought to see that we are guilty and helpless creatures, and do we dread the divine vengeance,—what can be so fitted to give rest to the conscience, as the cheering declaration of the divine good pleasure in the atonement ? Are our affections alienated from God, and set upon earthly things ? and are we, in the ardour of pursuit, the intoxication of pleasure, or the anxiety of disappointed hopes, carried away from the spring of true happiness ? how well calculated are the glorious discoveries of the Gospel to stop us in our mad career, to slay the enmity of the heart, and reconcile it to God.

Many things, indeed, we believe, which leave the mind as it was ; but there are reports which cannot be believed without affecting us. The former are things,



the truth or falsehood of which we conceive to be of no moment to us ; the latter, such as possess particular interest ; as, for example, the death or recovery of a beloved relative. Still, in the former, as well as in the latter case, there is a correspondence between the thing believed and the result. Now, what is the intrinsic worth, or the interest, which we can possibly have in any earthly thing, when compared with the unutterable importance of things divine and eternal ? And must not the belief of their nature and reality powerfully impress us ? I say their *nature* ; for as I formerly stated, faith is a belief of the qualities as well as the reality of its object. The reason why divine truths do not impress us, must be that their glory and their importance to ourselves are not believed. But when the power of God is so combined with his word as to enable the mind duly to regard spiritual objects, the heart becomes embued with holy principles and affections. Though a sword will not cut unless some one wield it, yet it possesses a natural fitness to cut when it is wielded. The Scriptures, accordingly, frequently appeal to living witnesses of their sanctifying energy, 1 Cor. vi. 11. 2 Cor. iii. 3. 1 Thess. i. 6—10.

It is very injurious, and fosters prejudices in certain quarters, to speak in a vague manner of the efficacy of faith. What good can a person receive by being told, that faith can effect this or the other great thing, while he is not told those truths, from the belief of which all Christian obedience, patience, and comfort arise ?—When we are informed in Scripture of what the ancient worthies did and suffered by faith, we are also referred to the testimony, promises, or threatenings, the belief of which influenced them according to their nature, and in this way effected what was intended. These examples are designed to encourage us in the constant exercise of faith, in order to our sanctification.

The purification of the heart, and of the life, by its means, is of the utmost moment. When Christ died, the work of atonement was finished for us, but there was much also to finish in us. He is our sanctification as



well as our righteousness or justification, 1 Cor. i. 30. Isaiah xlv. 24, 25. I need not tell you that he cannot be the former, by allowing us to live in sin, any more than he can be said to be made unto us wisdom, if he leave us to our own folly. It is not by being a substitute for our sanctification, but by actually sanctifying us, that he is to us the source of this blessing. The grand object of the Gospel is to assimilate the heart to God, by assimilating us to its own holy character; and hence true religion is called "walking in the truth." Like a mould which gives its form to a melted substance when cast into it, the Gospel so transforms the believer, that the principles of his heart accord with the revelation of God in the Scriptures. When you look to the book, it endears to you the man, and when you look to the man he endears to you the book. Religion, then, is not a mere matter of opinion; it is a practical change of the mind, or a principle growing out of fixed governing sentiment. Hence the following expressive address of Paul to the Ephesians,—“In whom also, after that ye believed,” or rather, in whom also believing, “ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” That is, in believing the Gospel, which was accompanied with the demonstration of the Spirit of God, they received the full impression of the truth, just as the melted wax receives the impressions of the seal, when applied to it with sufficient power, Ephes. i. 13.

Such is the view given in the Gospel, of the union of mercy and justice, in the plan of redemption through Christ, that the character of God appears at once amiable and venerable. We there see his abhorrence of sin in the very means of our forgiveness; and his mercy to be infinitely removed from weakness and partiality, while full of warmth and of tenderness. Indeed, were it not for the atonement, our redemption would not clearly appear to be the fruit of mere favour; for had not the divine abhorrence of sin been displayed in the very plan of mercy, it might have been alleged, that God had no great aversion to it, or that it did not deserve any par-



ticular mark of his reprobation. But the cross of Christ, by exhibiting the guilt of our rebellion, illustrates the nature and glory of divine goodness. Here the transgressor enters into the views, and imbibes the principles of the wondrous sufferer; and thus, identifying himself with his Lord, he becomes assimilated to his character. When he takes his station there, the arguments and demonstrations of the truth effectually convince the judgment,—the evil nature, and tremendous desert of sin, deeply impress the heart,—while the sublime, interesting, and animating views exhibited in the character of the Redeemer, captivate the affections. Yes, it is here that the melting attractions of the unsearchable riches of divine grace are most powerfully felt,—that the influence of the strong and interesting motives of the Gospel is found an irresistible stimulus to perseverance in well-doing, and patience under suffering; and that we approach the nearest to the spirit of the heavenly worshippers, who incessantly contemplate and adore the Lamb which was slain. In a word, it is the discoveries made here which produce and cherish that holy self-denied and subdued spirit which adorned the Saviour: which in us is connected with deep self-condemnation, and heartfelt contrition; and which makes meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, while it even here affords an earnest of the heavenly blessedness.

The truth of God, then, is that mighty instrument by which the divine Spirit transforms the soul into the image of God. It is the model of true religion in the mind. By this standard, and not by our own pre-conceived notions of what is fit and reasonable, ought we to be guided. By this means we shall be preserved from trusting to the fancied rationality of our views on the one hand, and from losing ourselves among the extravagancies of a wild enthusiasm on the other. To both of these the work of the Spirit is opposed. We ought then to unite a deep sense of the importance of clear and distinct apprehensions of the great truths of the Gospel, with an equally deep sense of our dependence



on the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, thereby to purify our souls, and to meeten us for the heavenly inheritance.

The change of mind which is effected by his agency, is in its commencement called regeneration, and in its subsequent stages it is called sanctification. The latter, therefore, is just our progressive recovery from the disease of sin, and our growth in conformity, in principle, and deportment, to the character of God.

The same means by which this change is begun, are employed in perfecting it. There is a wonderful fitness in the Gospel to produce in us this holy renovating effect. The Christian can give proper reasons for what he feels, and a rational account of the influence of the truth. He is attached to the Saviour, because he sees in his cross the most free and generous affection for himself when in guilt and in ruin. Such is the discovery given of the character of God, as to excite the most delightful and satisfying complacency in all and each of the divine perfections. While we live by faith in the Son of God, and hold fast the saving truth, we are struck with the manifestation of the divine glory, the beauty and the excellence of Jehovah, as at once the just God and the Saviour, and as the source and the pattern of all perfection and blessedness. It is thus that the heart is drawn to him, and captivated by his glory in the transporting character of the God and Father of Christ, and our God and Father through him. Here all that is great, and all that is good meet, and produce in our hearts the corresponding principles of fear and of love, which mutually influence, chasten, and temper each other. Thus are we made to advance in conformity to that which is the ground of our hope, and the source of our happiness. As the soul feeds upon its thoughts and desires, its hopes and affections, and its joys and its sorrows, so when God and the glories of his salvation engross our hearts, they become the moulds which give their form and character to the mind. The stronger the attachment, the greater is the effect, for



affection is remarkably assimilating ; like fire, it reduces every thing it fixes on into its own nature. We naturally take the likeness of the glories we contemplate, and are attracted to the perfections we adore. What then is this but our sanctification ? And hence Christians are so often, and so urgently exhorted to continue in the faith, to hold fast the truth, and to beware of forgetting it.

It is thus that the Gospel heals the diseases of the soul, and nourishes spiritual health. The same effects, you know, are ascribed to faith, and to the truth. This is done on the same principle on which we may either say, that we are cured by a medicine, or by taking it ; —either that we are nourished by food, or by eating it, John xvii. 17. Acts xv. 9 ; and xxvi. 18. All the virtue is in the medicine, but unless it be taken it can be of no use ; all the nourishment is in the food, but unless it be eaten it can be of no service. This shows the place which is occupied by faith in the matter of salvation : It is with the Gospel as with a cure for a disease.—As we are called to take medicine for the sake of health, and not for the mere sake of taking it, so we are called to believe the Gospel, that it may effect the cure of our spiritual disorders. In vain should a physician recommend to his patients to be in health, without giving medicine ; and equally vain must it be to call upon sinners to be holy, without declaring to them the medicinal doctrines of the Gospel.

What man was ever delivered from the government of his sinful propensities but by the influence of these doctrines ? Exhortations to love and obey God will never produce a salutary effect, unless accompanied by a display of the divine character, as exhibited in Christ, and of the wondrous discoveries afforded in the Gospel. You will accordingly find, on perusing the Scriptures, that it is always in connexion with the motives furnished by the plan of redemption that the Scriptures exhort to watchfulness, diligence, and exertion, Phil. ii. 5—13. 1 Cor. xv. 58. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Rom. xii. 1.



I cannot but remark here, that, when we think of the many and arduous duties which we have to perform, and the course of difficulty which we have to pursue, we must feel a deep conviction of the necessity of having the mind directed to adequate motives and inducements. It will not do to dwell only in a general way on the importance of religion, and the vanity of worldly pursuits. We need to be brought under the influence of the sweet and the powerful motives furnished by the doctrines that regard the atonement and intercession of Christ—the nature and permanence of his love—the evil, and dismal issue of sin, as displayed in his cross, and the blessed privilege of the aid of his Spirit to enlighten our minds, hallow our affections, and strengthen our hearts. If we dwell only on the holy, circumspect, and self-denying nature of Christian obedience, without adverting to the highly interesting motives, which alone can form the basis of genuine religious practice, the result will necessarily be a gloomy and imperfect appearance of piety. An outward decency of life, and an external compliance with the duties of religion, may follow ; but how different these from the surrender of the heart to God !

I am here led to make a remark or two on the importance of holding the sentiments of divine revelation. When we look into the natural world, we see, that every seed has a certain specific quality ; and that such is the constitution of nature, that every seed bringeth forth fruit after its kind. Now, there is a similar connexion between the principles and the actions of men, and hence the saying of our Lord, “ By their fruits ye shall know them.” You must be aware that, if we act in a rational manner, we are influenced by our views of things in all our determinations and pursuits, and that, therefore, if we see things through false mediums, we shall certainly err in our practice. If, then, professors of religion embrace, and act upon erroneous principles, they cannot fail to transgress the law of their God. Why were divine truths revealed to us at all if they are not fitted to rectify our principles and conduct ? They cannot have



been revealed to furnish us with certain speculative notions, to afford matter for idle discussion, or to gratify the silly pride of unprofitable knowledge.

Will not the persuasion, that it is of no moment whether we hold one religious sentiment or another, check the progress of inquiry, since, if truth and error are equally safe, it must be useless to spend time or talent in endeavouring to distinguish them?—Does it not lead to contemn the light which has followed the reformation, and to view with unconcern the darkness and the errors of the middle ages, and of those countries where all kinds of superstition and error abound? Does it not give the lie to the Scriptures, which assure us, that error is fearfully pernicious, and that truth is pregnant with all that is salutary, and which invariably trace all holy practice to truth as its source? 2 Tim. ii. 16—18. 1 Tim. iv. 16. Psalm xix. 7, 8. If truth and error existed in the mind as mere matters of speculation, their influence were small; but when they exist in us as principles of action, the case is very different. When we read that we shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body, we must not suppose, that actions apart from their principles are meant; for, apart from their principles, they are neither good nor evil. It is, therefore, as connected with their principles that we shall be judged according to them. Both Scripture and experience teach us, that doctrines, when believed, model the character. Accordingly, all the churches which departed from the truth, as for example the Corinthians and Galatians, are represented as declining also in holy obedience.

Habits of education, and such like things, may produce external propriety of deportment, but the Gospel alone can effect a radical and permanent change: By cleansing the fountain it purifies the streams. The apostle could look all human systems in the face, and ask with holy triumph, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John v. 5. Is it so, that Jesus, who was



a man of sorrows, who lived in poverty and shame, and who at last died the accursed death of the cross, is indeed the beloved Son of God! Is it so, that as the Father's heir, he is now glorified at his right hand as Lord of all things? Is it so, that he who suffered at the hand of the world is the object of the ineffable complacency of Heaven? And shall I again, after this discovery, pursue the world as my portion? No, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world."

What do we behold in the world but the lust of the flesh, or the love of sensual pleasures,—the lust of the eyes, or the love of wealth,—and the pride of life, or the desire of pre-eminence? 1 John ii. 16. Where such principles prevail, there is certain misery. But the Gospel is the power of God to salvation from every disordered passion of the heart,—it leads us to that exercise of the passions which is suited to their different objects. The Almighty views every thing as it is, and estimates it according to its nature and design; and what is religion but being of one mind with Him?—Now, faith in his word furnishes us with just sentiments, because when we credit his testimony we enter into his views, and imbibe the principles of his character. When we dwell on the dismal consequences of our love of earthly and sinful pleasures, as exhibited in the bitterness of the Saviour's sufferings; when, in the light of divine truth, we see their empty, low, and unsatisfactory nature; and when we taste of the pure spiritual and substantial blessings of the Gospel, we walk in the Spirit, and so cease to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, Gal. v. 16. 2 Tim. ii. 22. Isa. lv. 13.—When we contemplate the unwearied compassion and unutterable love of God, in providing for the interests of the soul, the mind is set at rest in regard to the body. When we look to him, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that he might enrich us with true substance, we are taught the unutterable importance of



eternity, and have the heart turned to things heavenly and divine, Gal. vi. 14. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Luke xii. 32. Rom. viii. 32. When we turn to the cross of Christ, and listen to the judgment which God pronounced upon us, when he condemned his own Son, as our representative,—when we mark the striking contrast which it exhibits between the dealings of God towards us, and our ungrateful returns to him,—when we ponder the deep humiliation of the Saviour,—and when we rise to the true glory to which it elevates us, the pride of our hearts is subdued, and genuine humility implanted, Rom. viii. 3. Isa. liii. 6. Phil. ii. 5—8.

The Gospel of Christ thus reasons with us on the evil of sin, and the glory of holiness. It likewise addresses the passions; for it appeals to our fears, our hopes, and our love, by the striking exhibition of all that is fitted to excite them. If it does not profit men, it is because it is not mixed with faith in them that hear it, Heb. iv. 2. If food cannot nourish the body unless it be eaten and digested, neither will the Gospel benefit the soul unless it becomes incorporated with it. We are influenced by the force of motives, which, on being apprehended by the mind, affect the passions, and govern the will. When the truth dwells within us, as the object of our faith, our thoughts are purified; and holy thoughts, you know, excite holy affections, and holy affections issue in rectitude of conduct. How admirably fitted are the discoveries of the Gospel to induce us to seek our happiness, not in the creature, but in God; to seek, not the perishing trifles of time, but the important realities of a blessed eternity; and to seek, in the day of affliction, not the cold consolations of the world, but the animating joys which arise from the character, the glory, and the promises of the Saviour.—“He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.” In his life we see the nature of that character to which we are destined to be conformed, and in which are contained the elements of all true happiness:—In his glory we see these principles producing in per-



fection their natural fruits. The doctrines of his cross thus tend to implant and cherish that piety which consists in the choice of God, as the portion of our inheritance,—desire after fellowship with him in the closet, in the family, and in his public institutions,—supreme regard to his authority,—a sacred and constant regard to his glory, zeal for his cause,—and humble and cheerful submission to his will, Ps. xvi. 5. Mark i. 35. John ii. 17, and xviii. 11.

They are likewise admirably calculated to produce the love of our neighbour, by the display which they afford of the interest which our common Father has taken in our welfare, in the plan of our redemption, from the evil in which all of us are involved, Titus iii.

- 3. 2 Cor. v. 14. We feel that in our fallen state there is a sad companionship of woe ; but in the Gospel we see an animating communion of hope. The grace of God excites in us a particular interest in those who are fellow-heirs with us of the heavenly inheritance ; but it also produces regard for even blasphemers and persecutors, by the consideration that they may yet be changed by the same mercy which we have experienced. When we remember that some, even of the worst of characters, may go before us, and others of them follow us into the heavenly temple, we learn to pity them, to pray for them, and to treat them with kindness.

You know that friendship formed by fellow-sufferers, and by the subjects of a common deliverance from a calamity which threatened to engulf them all, are among the very strongest on earth. No friendships equal those which are cemented by tears of sorrow and of joy. When such a common deliverance has been effected by a particular character, distinguished by generous and brotherly kindness, he becomes a bond of union and corresponding affection, of the most close and endearing nature. And will not the consideration of our common ruin, as sinners, and our common deliverance by the Redeemer, unite us to his truth, and to one another for his sake ? It is on this principle that we



are exhorted to walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour, Eph. v. 2. What a force there is in these words—"Thy brother, for whom Christ died," Rom. xiv. 15. 1 Cor. viii. 11. Is he dear to the heart which was pierced for our sins, and is he graven on the hands of him who achieved our redemption, and shall we not love him?

Nothing in the Gospel tends to cherish selfishness. The joy of the Christian loves to see itself multiplied and reflected. Our inheritance admits of participation without being diminished. It resembles truth, which suffers no change or diminution how many soever know it. When the mind is placed at ease in regard to eternity, it must extend abroad a tenderness of feeling—must experience an expansion of heart, an outflow of affection, which assimilates it to the God of all love.

Now, since "love is the fulfilling of the law," we are conformed to it when brought to love God and our neighbour. Our love to the Father of glory is implanted and cherished by the manifestations of his unutterable and free love in the Gospel. In our helpless and guilty condition, a vivid view of the divine majesty and holiness must overwhelm us with terror and dismay: but the mercy revealed in Christ commands our confidence. The fear which hath torment is banished; but there succeeds to it a sacred reverence for the character of God, and a holy fear of offending him. That same cross which exhibits him as the God of love, exhibits him as also light without darkness; and while it exalts his mercy, it shows him to be a consuming fire, 1 John i. 5.; iv. 8. Heb. xii. 29. When we contemplate the history of Emmanuel, and trace his progress from heaven to the cross, and back from the cross to heaven, that he might redeem us from the curse, and elevate us to glory, what must be the effect but overwhelming admiration, the warmest gratitude, and humble prostration of Spirit before our Benefactor!—The fear of which I speak, so far from being opposed to love, is in



fact proportioned to it; for in the same degree as a child loves his father, he will fear his frown. Neither is it incompatible with happiness; for even in heaven, where there is fulness of joy, the inhabitants exclaim, "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy!" Rev. xv. 4.

The Gospel detects all those unscriptural notions which derogate from the majesty and grandeur of Jehovah, and which are utterly inconsistent with holy and devout reverence; and it gives us such a consistent and stupendous manifestation of his peerless glory, that the mind can no longer raise itself against him, but drops all its high thoughts and proud imaginations. To bring us back to our original principle, the love of God and of every creature in him and for him, is the grand object of the Saviour. In this consists the spiritual health of our nature, and the new heart which is promised in the covenant of peace. It is the very element of our life and of our joy. Springing, as it does, from just apprehensions of the character of God, and from a sense of his mercies, it cherishes the most honourable sentiments regarding his law. Services the most unwearied are cheerfully performed; sacrifices of the most painful nature are willingly made, and sufferings the most distressing are patiently endured, when this principle rules in the heart. What hath not faith working by love effected! What a triumph have the doctrines of the cross gained over all the unhallowed passions of the heart!

These doctrines are the power of God to salvation, Rom. i. 16. They are that sound or healing instruction, of which so much is said in the epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus, 2 Tim. i. 13.; iv. 3. Titus ii. i. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 3. Ps. xix. 8.; and they are to be stated clearly and constantly, that men may be brought under their salutary influence, and that such as are Christians may be excited by their powerful energy to be careful to abound in good works, Titus iii. 3—8. It is true, that if stated as a mere theory, without being



applied, they cannot produce the desired effect ; but if taught in union with the other parts of revelation, they must, by the divine blessing, prove truly salutary. Agreeably to this, the Scriptures identify the new creature with the principle and the purifying influence of faith.—“ Faith, which worketh by love,” is represented as the root of holy dispositions and behaviour, Gal. v. 6. and of course the Gospel believed is the effectual cure of the depraved heart of man : and from this practical and healing tendency, the Scriptures infer its utility and its importance, 1 Tim. iv. 16. and vi. 3. 2 Tim. iii. 16. It is not by transient impressions, or incidental visitations of Providence, but by a permanent principle, that the heart is drawn out to obedience, dissolved in gratitude, or blessed with happiness. He who is born of God overcometh the world, and the principle which is thus declared to be of divine origin, and to be the means of our victory, is faith, 1 John v. 4. In a word, by the truth of God, and the agency of his Spirit, we are regenerated at first, John i. 11, 12. and by it thus written upon the heart, are we also progressively sanctified, John xvii. 17. ; and when in heaven the change shall be perfected, although there we shall not stand in need of Bibles, yet even there it will be by the full revelation to us of that character now unfolded to us in the Scriptures, that we shall become completely like to God ; for the word of the Lord, and the relation into which it brings us, and the character which it forms in us, shall endure for ever, 1 Pet. i. 23. The nature of the agency which will then disclose to us this transforming light, it were vain to inquire after.—I am, &c.



## LETTER XXV.

## THOUGHTS ON THE REASONING OF JAMES, ON THE JUSTIFICATION OF ABRAHAM.

Justification used to denote two things in Scripture—Is used by James to express the means of the renovation of the character, and the approbation which follows it—The trial of Abraham's faith exercised and strengthened it—His holy character was formed by it, and obtained the Divine approbation—The same doctrine taught by Paul—The forgiveness of Abraham, the pattern of that of believers—His character, the pattern of that of believers—The reasoning of James respecting Faith—The happiness of having the Divine approbation—The duty of imitating the father of the faithful.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE dwelt for some time on the ground of forgiveness, and the means of a change of character. The latter is connected with every part of the truth; for the whole of Divine revelation is designed for practical purposes. He who has been pardoned by the grace of God, will lament his contrariety to the character and will of his Benefactor, and will be anxious to become like Him, and to obtain his approbation. These desires are met in the Gospel, and provision is made to gratify them: Allow me, in illustration of this subject, to call your attention to what I formerly stated respecting the meaning of the term *justification*, as it bears on the reasoning of the apostle James, in regard to Abraham.

When this term is applied to the acceptance of a sinner, it signifies his discharge from the condemnatory sentence of the law, and his being treated as though he were righteous, and, so far as the former is concerned, it differs not from forgiveness, except in this, that the latter may be the deed of a private as well as of a public character, and may respect private as well as public offences, whereas the former is the deed of a ruler in his public capacity, and regards the offences from which



the offender is justified, as committed against the government, of the laws of which the ruler is the guardian. Considered in this view, the term justification relates to the honourable medium through which the blessing of forgiveness is bestowed, and signifies that it is communicated in a way which supports the claims of the violated law, while it also signifies the acceptance of the sinner as righteous for the sake of the righteousness of Christ.

But though this be its meaning, when it is used to express the acceptance of a sinner, it properly signifies the approbation of a man's principles and character as actually righteous. Elihu accordingly expresses his desire of being able to approve of the spirit of Job, by saying, "speak, for I desire to justify thee," Job xxxiii. 32. And when Job expressed his disapprobation of his friends, he said, "God forbid that I should justify you," Job xxvii. 5. David, in confessing his guilt to the Almighty, said, "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest," Ps. li. 4. The lawyer, willing to justify himself, said, "Who is my neighbour?" Luke x. 29. In this sense, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." The Saviour says, "By thy words, (or by thy account, for it is the word rendered account in the preceding verse,) thou shalt be justified," that is, approved, "and by thy account thou shalt be condemned." I need not say that in these and similar passages, the term justify by no means signifies pardon, but, on the contrary, approbation grounded upon excellence of character, as made manifest by appropriate actions.

Now, excellence which calls forth praise, cannot require forgiveness. The meaning of the term in such cases, must be the same as when it is said, "Not he that commendeth himself is approved; but whom the Lord commendeth," 2 Cor. x. 18. And, "Study to show thyself approved unto God," 2 Tim. ii. 15. I cannot help thinking, that it is rather to be regretted that the term justify has been employed to denote the



pardon and acceptance of guilty creatures. It had been better, perhaps, if, in translating the phrase expressive of a change in the legal standing of a sinner, a mode of expression had been used, different from that which in our language so fitly expresses the Divine approbation of the fruits of that new character which results from a change in the principles of his mind.

It is in this last sense that the term justify is used by the apostle James, when he says that Abraham our father was justified by works, James.ii. 21. He is not speaking of the pardon of Abraham, or of his legal acceptance as righteous, but of his actual character as the object of the Divine approbation and complacency. His pardon was of pure favour; and of this the apostle Paul treats, in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, and in the third of that to the Galatians.—But James is speaking of his being approved of as a righteous character, and of the means by which the righteousness of his character was formed. Both these apostles adduce the case of Abraham in illustration of their reasoning; but it ought to be observed that they refer to different periods and circumstances in his history. When first called of God, he believed in the Lord; and was in consequence of his faith in the promised Messiah, treated as though he had been righteous, by being forgiven and accepted, for the sake of the Saviour in whom his faith terminated, and it is of this that Paul treats. But the design of God was not merely to pardon him and receive him into his family; his object was, to train him up for “glory, honour, and immortality.” Now, this could only be attained by the trial and consequent exercise of his faith in a course of patient continuance in well-doing. And it is of the latter that James treats. Paul, then, refers to the acceptance of a sinner,—James to the approbation of a saint.

Faith wrought ~~with~~ his works, or was exercised in and by means of his work of obedience to the commandments of his God, and by means of works proceeding



from and exercising faith, was faith "made perfect:" that is, it was gradually invigorated till it was matured. It is a law in nature, that the exercise of a principle strengthens it; and this is explanatory of the whole matter. Though faith must precede good works, since without it no acceptable service can be performed, yet, where faith exists, the exercise of it in acts of obedience, will not only manifest its existence and degree, but will also strengthen it. If faith, then, is thus strengthened by obedience, it is easy to see how the assurance of hope is connected with it, without in the least infringing on the blessed truth, that the Gospel, as soon as it is believed, imparts peace and joy in proportion to the measure of faith in it. For if the assurance of hope keeps pace with the degree of our faith, does it not follow that whatever strengthens the latter, confirms the former? If, then, obedience, by exercising faith adds to its strength, must not this increased faith add to the assurance of hope? Can we fail, therefore, to see with what propriety Christians are called on to make their "calling and election sure," by adding to their faith all holy dispositions, and by abounding in the fruits of righteousness? 2 Peter i. 5—11. In believing the Gospel, we embrace not a speculative system, but a system of motives which daily increase in power by their habitual operation, both on the understanding and the will. This operation converts every event, and every performed duty, whether of doing or of suffering, into an accession of strength, into a mean of advancing towards perfect conformity to the will of God. It is with this as with capital and gain in trade. The greater a merchant's capital is, the greater, other things being equal, will be his profits; and the greater the latter are, the more will his capital become, and this increase of capital will produce still greater profits. These two act and re-act on each other. The faith of Abraham was tried by a variety of commands which were given him by God; and it was strengthened by every act of self-renunciation and of obedience to the will of his Father.



The maturity of his faith, then, was produced by habitual action.

His faith was particularly tried by the commandment to offer up that son in whom the nations were to be blessed. But the trial of his faith in the promise, led him to think the more on its nature,—on the power, faithfulness, and love of Him who had made it,—on all that tended to confirm the certainty of its being accomplished, and on the relation which it bore to the spiritual and eternal world. By being thus led to ponder the promise more closely, he became the better acquainted with its nature, importance, and glory; his faith in it was the more confirmed, and was indeed so matured, that he lifted up his hand to slay that very son in whom it was to be accomplished, in the firm confidence that though he was reduced to ashes, God was able and ready to raise him from the dead, and to fulfil every word which he had spoken, Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19. His faith was thus wondrously exercised in corresponding works, and by this habit of action was brought to maturity, and by its influence upon him formed that character of which God expressed his high and delighted approbation. Now, it is to the formation of this character, and the approbation of it expressed by the Lord from heaven, that the apostle refers, when he says, that the Patriarch “was justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar,” James ii. 21. What was that justification? Not the forgiveness of his sins, and his legal acceptance as righteous, and a consequent change of state. It was the approbation of his deeds of faith and of piety, as the means at once of perfecting and of manifesting that character in which God delighteth. “Now I know,” said Jehovah from heaven, “that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me,” Gen. xxii. 12. To express still farther his approbation of the principles and work of the Patriarch, he renewed to him the promises formerly made to him, and confirmed them by his solemn oath, Gen. xxii. 16—19. Heb. vi. 13—17.



His faith is introduced by James, then, as the means of producing and maturing those principles of piety by which he became the object of divine complacency. This explains his meaning in these words—"Ye see then how that by work a man is justified, and not by faith only." He is not speaking of that change of state which takes place on a sinner's believing in Christ, but of the divine approbation of the principles and fruits of that character which is formed, not by a single instance of faith merely, nor by the single act of contemplating abstract truth, but by the continued practical exercise of faith in that Gospel, the belief of which, while it changes the sinner's state, changes also his mind. He accordingly says, that the Scripture declaration, that Abraham believed God, and was in consequence treated as though he were righteous, was "fulfilled," or verified, by his ready obedience to the commandment of Heaven. The means of a sinner's pardon and acceptance are the moral means of his sanctification. While a sense of unpardoned guilt remains in the conscience, the enmity of the heart is thereby fostered; but a sense of the pardoning mercy of Jehovah reconciles the sinner to his God, and excites to obedience. When, therefore, sanctification is effected, it is a proof, as James here teaches, that the individual has indeed believed the truth, and has experienced the happy and purifying effects of that temper of mind which must result from the blessedness of a state of forgiveness.

Pardon, you know, is connected with faith only, and not with works of law; but the approbation of God must of necessity be grounded on *character*, as formed and manifested by good works. Now, this character is in this life gradually formed. It is not the result of *one* exercise of faith only, but of the continual and persevering exercise of it, in doing and suffering the will of God. The faith of a man when he first receives the truth, is very imperfect, and it requires to be strengthened by exercise. As it is imperfect, the change upon his character must be so likewise, so that there can be



little in him to call forth the divine approbation. One instance of the exercise of faith brings a sinner into a state of acceptance with God. On believing in the work of the Mediator, God, in the character of the Judge and the Lawgiver, pardons his sins, and receives him into the kingdom of his Son. But if he were to live in the world without exercising his faith, and so by this means having it strengthened, he could not make progress in holiness, and of course could not be approved of God as a righteous character. If a child, on coming into the world, did not breathe, we should pronounce it dead. Though it had once been alive, yet without breathing, life could not continue; for the body without breathing is dead. If faith, in like manner, is not exercised, not only will it not grow, but it will decline and die: and the character instead of becoming more holy, must be marked by the prevalence of sin, and will incur condemnation.

When a Christian, from love to the Saviour, performs acts of kindness to his brethren, his mind is by this very means kept in contact with the truth, and he grows in the faith of it.\* It follows, then, as the Apostle reasons, that by works, as the fruit of faith, and also as the means of exercising and strengthening it, is a man sanctified, and made to attain that excellence of character which calls forth the approbation of Heaven. The Scriptures, accordingly, distinguish real faith by the nature and permanence of its fruit. It is not, then, by one exercise of faith merely, that a man is justified, in the sense of which I now speak, that is, attains that rectitude of character, on the ground of which he is approved of as a holy person,—it is by continuing a life of holy obedience—in the performance of works of faith and labours of love, Heb. vi. 10—12.

The notion, that but one exercise of faith secures either a man's safety, or his meetness for heaven, independently of his perseverance to the end, is clearly in direct opposition to the doctrine of Paul. He never calls faith an inert principle.



It is wrong, therefore, to represent Paul and James as at variance, for the latter is not treating at all of the pardon of sin, and of the way in which this blessing is obtained. He states, however, in verse 10th of this very chapter, a position which establishes the doctrine of forgiveness through faith, and not by the works of the law, when he says, that if we have kept the whole law, and have offended in one point only, we are guilty of all. He has thus declared, that to the man who has sinned but once, acceptance by law is impossible. Paul, again, though he has largely treated the subject of a sinner's acceptance with God, through faith, without works of law, has also largely treated the subject of which James is now speaking. He accordingly says to the Corinthians, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea I judge not mine own self: For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord," 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. He means, that though his conscience did not charge him with unfaithfulness, yet the testimony of his conscience would be of no avail, unless sanctioned by the approving sentence of his final Judge. There can be no doubt regarding the sense in which he uses the term justified in the 4th verse, for in the one following he expresses his meaning by saying, that in the day of the Lord, every faithful servant shall have praise of God. When speaking on this subject, he exhorts believers to walk so as to please God, 1 Thess. iv. 1. He reminds them of the testimony borne to Enoch, that he pleased God, Heb. xi. 5. He excites to liberality and deeds of kindness, by this consideration, that with such sacrifices God is well pleased, Heb. xiii. 16. He says, that the circumcised in heart have praise of God, Rom. ii. 29. He says that he who serveth Christ as a subject of that kingdom which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, is accepted or approved of God, Rom. xiv. 17, 18. He declares that he laboured, that, whether present or absent, he might be accepted or approved of Christ, 2 Cor. v. 9. In the



prospect of martyrdom he exclaimed, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing," 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. He dwells with as great zeal on the practical influence of the faith of Christ as does James. Who can read the sixth, eighth, and twelfth chapters of his epistle to the Romans; the sixth, tenth, and thirteenth of his first epistle to the Corinthians; the latter part of his epistles to the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, as well as those to Timothy and Titus, without being fully convinced that the practical influence of the Gospel was kept steadily in his view, and was in the most solemn and energetic manner pressed on the conscience of every one who professed the faith? Is not the necessity of continuing to abound in the practical exercise of faith most strikingly enforced in the third, fourth, sixth, and tenth chapters of the epistle to the Hebrews? Never let one sacred writer be put in the least in opposition to another; for if we think that there is any difference between the doctrines of one and those of another, the reason must be, that at least one of them is misunderstood by us.

The justification or approbation of which James speaks, is of the same nature with that which shall be pronounced by the Redeemer, as the ruler of his mediatorial kingdom; and it is illustrated by the language of Christ to those who have improved their endowments,—"Well done," says he, "thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."—"Well done, thou good servant, because thou hast been faithful over a very little, have thou authority over ten cities," Matt. xxv. 21. Luke xix. 17. He will at the last address his benevolent people in these terms,—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation



of the world ; For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : Naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me," Matt. xxv. 34—36. Now, even in the present life, the faithful servants of Christ are approved of, as is evident from his language to some of the Asiatic churches ; so that the blessing enjoyed by Abraham on earth is enjoyed by them likewise, Rev. ii. 8—11 ; and iii. 7—13.

Time would fail me were I to go over the many passages of Scripture which refer to the present approbation of the faithful, and to that applauding sentence which will be pronounced by the Judge when he surveys his faithful disciples from the throne of his glory. We need not be surprised then, at the zeal manifested by James, (but not by him only) against all who, under a profession of faith in the Gospel, indulged in the practice of sin. The depravity of man will abuse the most holy doctrines of Scripture ; but while we oppose this abuse, let us beware of obscuring the glory of those doctrines.

An objecting Jew in the days of James might well say to such a perverter of the grace of God, "Thou hast faith and I have works, show me thy faith by *thy* works, (this is the reading of some copies, as you will see in the margin) and I will show thee my faith by *my* works." "Let our respective creeds be tried by their fruits,"—a proposal certainly quite unobjectionable. Vain is the reply which some suppose made to this,— "Thou believest that there is one God ; thou doest well ;" (as if to say, 'this is a great matter truly,')—"the very devils believe this and they tremble ;" to them no Gospel is preached, and what they believe can yield them no joy ; but I am a Christian, I do not merely believe that there is one God, as do the unbelieving Jews ; (for by their belief in the unity of the Godhead, the Jews were distinguished from the idolatrous Gentiles,) I believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Mes-



siah, and in the Gospel preached by him." To such a man it might well be said, as is done by the apostle, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead,"—or it is not faith at all. Could we even conceive of faith having begun to exist in a man, and never to have been called into exercise by appropriate works, his faith could not survive,—it must necessarily die. In such a man faith, being inert, could not exist. A profession of faith, therefore, where no works follow, be it found in whom it may, is a profession of it without the reality. The fact is, whatever may be said of his faith, that which he believes is not the Gospel, but a thing of such a nature that it can have no salutary effect.

I need not say that the use made by James of what is said of Abraham's believing in God, and so being pardoned, as verified by his after conduct, is a striking proof, that though a change of state and a change of character are distinct, they are yet closely connected, and both connected with faith. The importance attached to the case of Abraham arises from this, that on his being justified by faith, he was constituted the father, in a spiritual sense, of all among mankind, who, to the end of time, should be justified in the same way. It is common in the Scriptures to call persons distinguished by any quality or acquisition, the children of those by whom it was first and pre-eminently possessed. Thus, we read that Jabal was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle; and that Jubal was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. In like manner, they who resemble Abraham in his faith, are justified as he was, and are called his children. "Against hope, he believed in hope;" that is, he believed and hoped that the promised seed would be given, though every thing in nature and experience was against such an expectation. He believed in God, as the quickener of the dead—the creator of life. In like manner, when a sinner believes unto justification, he sees nothing in himself, on account of which the



blessing should be given him ; but he believes in the grace of God, who, through the perfect work of his Son, can honourably justify the ungodly.

These two things illustrate each other ; and hence the apostle reasons from the faith of Abraham in regard to the promised Son, to throw light on that through which forgiveness is obtained. If conformity to the law had been necessary to the latter, then Abraham could not have obtained it, and the nations could not have been blessed in him.—But he obtained it by faith in Him of whom Isaac was a pledge and a type ; and all who believe as he did, enjoy the same blessing with him, and hence are denominated his children. Not that Abraham was the first believer in the Messiah, and the first who was justified through faith in him,—for Abel, Enoch, Noah, and many others, were partakers of the righteousness which is by faith, Heb. xi. 4—7. But when, after the flood, the knowledge of God was a second time in a great measure lost, the Lord, instead of again sweeping at once the ungodly from the earth, by a deluge, was pleased to separate from the midst of them a people for himself. To accomplish this gracious purpose, he called Abraham out from amongst idolaters, and made of his posterity a nation, among whom he placed his name, in order to preserve, by a regular and peculiar system of typical institutions, the knowledge of his character, and of the plan of redemption, till the Messiah should come,—to hold up a figurative representation of the kingdom of Christ ; and to prepare for the more full manifestation of the divine glory, in the extension and establishment of this kingdom among all the nations of the earth, Gen. xii. 2, 3. ; xv. 4—6. ; xvii. 3—8. ; and xxii. 15—18. Rom. iv. 1—22.

To Abraham, as the founder or father of this spiritual family, were the promises of mercy through Christ more fully unfolded than they had been before ; and hence his faith was fitly exhibited as the pattern of that faith through which sinners should in every age be



justified. The manner in which he was justified was designed to illustrate the only way in which the guilty can obtain the blessing of acceptance with God; and hence the care taken, both in the Old Testament and the New, to show what was his original character as a sinner, and the way in which he, ungodly as he was, obtained that blessing, Joshua xxiv. 2. Ezekiel xvi. 3. Isaiah li. 1, 2. Rom. iv. 1—22. Gal. iii. 6—9, 18.

There is an evident fitness in the selection of Abraham to be the pattern of the faith and the blessedness of the church of God, because he was the first person in the world, to whom the promise of being the progenitor of the Messiah was made; while that event, according to the order of nature, did not necessarily follow. It was, according to the order of nature, necessary that he should descend from our first parents; and, on the same principle, it was necessary, after the flood, that he should descend from Noah; but there was no natural necessity that he should descend from Abraham rather than from any other of the multitudes then upon the earth.

Since, then, he was the first to whom this special favour was granted, it was meet that his faith should be so distinctly exhibited in connection with its great object, the promised Deliverer, as to be the pattern of faith to the family of God; and that his character and blessedness should be the pattern of the character and blessedness of all the redeemed. His justification, by faith in the Messiah, is recorded and attested, not for his own sake alone, but for an example and assurance to all generations. All are accordingly assured, that they shall in like manner be justified if they believe on him who raised up our Lord Jesus from the dead,—who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification, Rom. iv. 23—25.

But allow me, dear friend, to advert again to the character produced by the faith of Abraham. There is an evident fitness in making him, whose faith and justification are the pattern of the faith and acceptance of the



people of God in all ages of the world, a high example likewise of the *sanctifying* influence of the faith of the Gospel. Imperfections and evils do indeed appear in his character ; but considering the comparatively dark dispensation under which he was placed, it nevertheless exhibits a very striking display of the power of the truth. One great end for which the commandment to offer up Isaac was given him, was, that by this means there might be a discovery of his confidence in God—his love to his name ; and, in a word, of that constellation of graces which were thus brought into full and powerful operation. We are not to suppose, that the benefit of this trial was intended for the good of Abraham alone, but we must consider it as of standing use to the church in all ages of the world. Those of the Jews who openly rejected the Gospel of Jesus, boasted that Abraham was their father : and from the reasoning of James it appears, that some who professed to receive the truth, were inclined to do the same, though in a different way. The example of the forgiveness of Abraham through faith in the Messiah, appears to have been wrested by them to their own destruction. They gloried in the correctness of their creed, spoke highly of salvation by grace, and confided in the safety of their state ; while their tongues were unbridled, their tempers ungoverned, and the practical fruits of righteousness were quite disregarded, James i. 26, 27. ; iii. 14—17. The national pride, which in no small degree led one class of the Jews avowedly to oppose the Gospel, had in this latter class given place to, or had become mixed with, spiritual pride, arising from a supposed connection established between them, as Christians, and Abraham, as their father in that character.—That their errors arose from a perversion of what had been taught by Paul, in relation to the forgiveness of Abraham through faith, without works of law, is evident, from this consideration, that the very language and passages of Scripture which he had employed in illustrating the subject of the forgiveness of that patriarch are referred to



by James, and are rescued by him from the willful perversions of these nominal Christians.

He employs, in the 15th and 16th verses, an illustration in regard to love, which shows, that he considered the faith of these licentious professors of religion as a non-entity,—an empty false profession. What should we say of the love of that man, who, when asked to relieve a brother or a sister in distress, would in words express for him or for her the greatest affection and the warmest wishes, but yet would refuse to afford even the smallest assistance? Would we allow him to be possessed of love because he said he was so? Would we not rather consider his conduct a compound of hypocrisy, meanness, and cruelty? On the same principle, if a man say he has faith, but does not manifest it by corresponding works, must we not conclude, that he is making a false profession, or, in other words, that he is utterly a stranger to faith in the Gospel? Works are as much connected with faith as breathing is with life, which seems to be the meaning of spirit in verse 26th.

Now, there is not in this reasoning of James the least degree of opposition to the doctrine of Paul. Surely, when the latter speaks of faith, he speaks of what is really such, and not of an empty profession of it, which is no more faith than a counterfeit piece of money is money, or than a dead body is a man. No one can for a moment dream, that in order to establish the doctrine of free forgiveness through faith, it is necessary to assert, that an empty and false profession of it will interest in the blessing. I need not again say, that this were not faith, but hypocrisy; and, therefore, to suppose that a man could in this way be forgiven, were to teach, not the doctrine of acceptance through faith, but the absurd notion of acceptance through hypocrisy.

The great reason why men are pardoned through faith in the Gospel, is, that as the ultimate object of their pardon is their sanctification, and as this cannot be affected by the truth, unless it is believed, it is necessary that the Gospel be believed, in order that the



object of redemption may be gained. It follows, then, that as nothing short of a real belief of the truth can bring a sinner under its hallowing influence, the confession of the mouth, which is connected with salvation, must flow from the belief of the heart. With great propriety, therefore, did James refute the error of these Jewish professors, by a reference to the history of their father Abraham.

Addressing the avowed unbelievers among the Jews, Christ said, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham," John viii. 39. ; and the reasoning of James with professed believers is the same. The justification of the patriarch was an act of free grace and of pure compassion ; and great would be his peace and his joy when called from a state of condemnation to a state of acceptance. But his blessedness must have advanced as he grew in acquaintance with the promises and character of God. What a view is given us of his happiness in these words,—“and he was called the friend of God,” James ii. 23. 2 Chron. xx. 7. Isa. xli. 8. It was in that confidential intercourse with God—that cultivation of fellowship with him—that imitation of him—that ready obedience to him—that union with him, in judgment, affection, and aim—and that entire trust in him which so highly distinguished his character, that his blessedness was continued and advanced. His happiness was still farther heightened by the delightful sense of the approbation and complacency with which Jehovah regarded him ; and by the many tokens he received of the unceasing care and kindness of his God. In the day of the Lord, all his sins will be declared forgiven ; but, in as far as his character was righteous, forgiveness will not be called for. The approbation which he received when on earth, will then be ratified by his just and applauding Judge.

This view of the subject gives an edge to those parts of Scripture which call upon Christians to seek, that they may be found at last of the Judge, “in peace, and without spot, and blameless ;” and which exhibit even



to them, the solemn nature of his judgment, 2 Pet. iii. 14. 1 John ii. 28. Rom. xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10.—Never let any sentiment be admitted which would blunt the admonitions of Scripture, and reduce to unmeaning sounds the solemn warnings of Heaven. On the other hand, ever give the proper place to the doctrines of the cross, and the gracious promises of the covenant.

When the Christian, dear friend, thinks of the sins that stain even his religious services, and of the imperfections that at best mingle with them, he may well wonder that any of them should be acknowledged by his Lord. Even when the redeemed are at the seat of judgment declared the approved servants of Christ, they are represented as expressing their surprise that they should be thus applauded, Matth. xxv. 37, 38, 39.—But the Saviour can separate from what is sinful all that proceeded from love, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Many were the errors and the infirmities of his first disciples; but in his intercessory prayer on the night in which he was betrayed, he does not mention one of them. All that was good in their behaviour, he separates from what was evil; the latter had been forgiven, and the former he approves. To his father he says of them, “They have kept thy word.” “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.” “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” See in this a disposition to commend rather than condemn, and learn to trust in him as one who will not forget our work of faith, and our labour of love. Job, notwithstanding his occasional failures, was upon the whole a submissive sufferer; and hence God, exhibiting him as an example, says to us, “Ye have heard of the patience of Job.” What a kind Master do we serve! Ought we not to be ambitious of high degrees of his approbation? On the resurrection morn, when on



coming forth from the grave, and on viewing all the grandeur and importance of eternity, our first thoughts and words will turn upon the atonement of him through whom we have obtained the victory, 1 Cor. xv. 45—57. —when we shall count it an unutterable blessing to “find mercy of the Lord in that day,” how transporting to find, that not only are all our sins declared completely forgiven, but that He who “washed us in his blood,” will kindly and openly declare his complacency in our poor services in his cause on earth. Will not this at once humble and elevate the heart? Will it not make the whole soul to thrill with ecstatic delight? —Will it not be joy unutterable and full of glory?

Let us seek, then, to manifest the tried faith and approved obedience of the father of the faithful. He is held up as an eminent example of the supporting and sanctifying influence of faith in the atonement. Let us give glory to God as he did, by implicit confidence in his word, and unreserved and persevering submission to his will. The love of God towards us has been manifested in the merciful forgiveness of our sins; but his great object in thus displaying his compassion, is to effect our deliverance from sin, and to advance us to that exalted blessedness which results from a holy resemblance to him, from union of heart with him, and from the enjoyment of his complacent satisfaction in our character and services. May it be justly said of us, that our spirit and conduct, like that of Abraham, make it manifest that, like him, we “have been treated as though we were righteous,” for the sake of the Redeemer. What a happiness thus to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour! Like the patriarch, let us cultivate the spirit of pilgrims, and look for the heavenly country; let us, like him, be decided in the service of God; contented with our lot on earth, the friends of peace, kind to all men, particularly attached to the family of God, and distinguished by the patient self-denial and perseverance of a life of faith. And may it be our hap-



pincess, as it was his, to die in the peace and hope of the faith of Christ, and to be gathered to the assembly above.—I remain, &c.

## LETTER XXVI.

### ON THE MANNER IN WHICH THE SCRIPTURES INTRO- DUCE THE DIVINE PURPOSES.

Improper manner of considering the Divine decrees—Christians said to be chosen of God, because separated from the world—The purposes of God introduced, to illustrate the freeness of grace in the plan of redemption—Designed to confirm our faith in its accomplishment—As an encouragement to Christians in the time of affliction—Intended as a warning to gain-sayers—The Gospel is addressed to all—Its invitations rest on the value of the atonement—The ground of condemnation, the rejection of the Gospel—The character of the Jews and proselytes, in the days of our Lord and his apostles—The importance of stating truth in a Scriptural manner.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WITH a view to assist you in your endeavours to be useful, I shall now suggest to you some general remarks on the leading connexion in which the Scriptures introduce the subject of the Divine purposes. You are right in thinking that many an inquirer has been exceedingly injured by being led to pry into the subject of election, instead of being occupied with the unrestricted calls and invitations of the Gospel. No man obtains the blessings of redemption, by believing that he is elected of God, or that Christ died for him, in distinction from others, but by believing the broad declaration of Scripture, that the Saviour “died for sinners,” and “for the ungodly,” and that his atonement is sufficient to cleanse from all sin. This blessed testimony every one is called to believe, in order to his salvation, without waiting till any preliminaries are settled, respecting the decrees of the Almighty. Christians have obtained the blessings of mercy in the way of coming to the



Saviour, not as persons chosen of God, but as poor, guilty, and helpless sinners, having no plea but what arises from his work, and from the promise of life through him.

In accordance with this, a writer, whose views of the subject in question will not be suspected of being too low, has said that "election is often put for selection or separating by calling." In this way, he interprets the expression in Rom. viii. 33. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" understanding it of those who, in verse 30, are said to be actually called, and against whom, as persons actually justified in time, no charge can be so laid as to subject them to condemnation: and he refers to Isaiah xiv. 1.; xlviii. 10.; Ezek. xx. 5. and John xv. 19. in proof of the application of the word in question to occurrences in the present state. (Beart on the Law and the Gospel, part ii. page 15.)

I remarked in a former letter, that the change of mind which separates Christians from the world, is often expressed by their being said to be called and chosen of God, out of the kingdom of darkness into that of Christ. The terms elect and chosen, and words of similar import, are accordingly sometimes applied to the conversion of the soul in time, and not to the transactions of eternity, John xv. 19. 1 Peter i. 2.; ii. 9. Thus, in Colossians iii. 12. Christians are called upon to act as elect persons: that is, as appears from the connexion, as persons separated from the world by a change of state and of character, which change it behoved them to manifest by a corresponding spirit and deportment. Thus, too, we read of the faith of God's elect, that is, of those who had believed through grace, Titus ii. 1. Accordingly, the term is used to express the excellence of the Christian character. Thus, by the elect sister, John means an excellent sister (2 John 13.); and Paul sends his salutation to Rufus as one chosen in the Lord, that is, an excellent Christian, Rom. xvi. 13. I mention this view of the subject, to show you the importance of being guided in the interpretation of Scripture, by the



sense of every particular passage, and not by mere sound. In the last quoted passage, the reference is obviously to something in the character of Rufus, by which he was distinguished even among disciples. I need not tell you, that I am far from meaning that such is always the import of the term in question : but as my object is to show the connexions in which the Scriptures introduce the purposes of God, I wish to distinguish those passages which do not directly introduce them, from such as do, because the subject cannot otherwise be properly illustrated ; and, besides, it is of great importance to give to every passage of Scripture its proper application.

When the Scriptures speak of salvation, in connection with the choice and fore-appointment of God, they often refer to the general plan of redemption, as a plan, according to which men are saved, not in consequence of merit, or birth, or external privileges, as the unbelieving Jews imagined, but of free favour. The Jews, unhappily, considered the blessings of Messiah's kingdom as exclusively theirs, in virtue of their descent from Abraham, their privileges under the Mosaic law, and the observance of its rites. They allowed, indeed, that Gentiles might obtain some of the blessings of his kingdom, but only by becoming members of the Jewish commonwealth, and the observance of their law. In opposition to these notions, the apostles, in many passages of their writings, teach that the plan of salvation was fixed before the division of man into Jews and Gentiles took place, yea even before mankind existed, Eph. iii. 8—11. 1 Pet. i. 20—25.

The design of such passages is not to introduce discussions about the secret counsels of Heaven, and perplexing questions respecting individuals, but to teach, in opposition to those who confined the blessings of the kingdom of God to such as enjoyed the privileges, and walked in the observances of the Mosaic law, that the plan on which salvation, and all heavenly blessings, were to be imparted, was fixed before that law was establish-



ed, and entirely independent of it; that is, it was fixed to be of pure favour, and not by the works of any law whatever, Acts xv. 9—11, 14—18.

The reasoning employed on this subject applies to every law, and establishes the doctrine of free justification through faith in Christ, in opposition to justification by law, whether in whole or in part. Though the apostle makes a particular reference to the Jewish claims, yet his argument embraces the whole controversy between God and man, on the subject of acceptance, because it is founded on the nature of things, and, therefore, applies equally well to every principle of a false religion, and every perversion of the true. The question, then, is not confined to the Jewish law, though the disputes about that law gave occasion to the more full discussion of the subject of acceptance with God, 1 Tim. i. 7—11.

The Spirit of such passages of the epistles of Paul as Rom. iv. 9—16. and Gal. iii. 8, 9, 17, 18. which treat of the way of acceptance, is that of many of those which speak of the divine purposes. In the former of these he shows that Abraham was justified before his circumcision, and, of course, not by it; and that the priority of the covenant which includes the Gentiles, to the giving of the law of Moses, proves that the blessing freely promised is not obtained by obedience to that law, but by faith in the promise. The argument in the latter passage is similar; and, like the former, it establishes a general principle, viz. that redemption is not to be obtained by obedience to any law whatsoever, as well as not by obedience to the Mosaic law in particular, but by free grace through faith. This general principle is most decidedly established in those passages where we are taught, that the plan of redemption was fixed to be of pure grace, not only before the promulgation of the law of Moses, but before the earliest of the ages or dispensations, yea, even before the foundation of the world, 2 Tim. i. 9. Titus i. 2, 3. Eph. i. 4, 5, 9—11. Col. i. 25—27.



The design, then, of such parts of Scripture, is to teach us, that the most ungodly may by divine grace obtain the blessings of salvation; since the whole depends, not on human merit, or upon any thing which naturally distinguishes one man from another, but on the free and the sovereign pleasure of Heaven. The door of mercy is thus set open, and those who to human view are the most unlikely to be subjects of the kingdom of Christ, are as welcome to him as are others.—The blessings of redemption are not the birthright of any, but are bestowed without the smallest regard to the limitations dictated by the pride and the bigotry of men. Hence the reasoning used in the 9th chapter of the epistle to the Romans, to show, that, as the temporal inheritance, which was a figure of the heavenly, did not go by birth, but as Jehovah pleased, so the spiritual blessings of the kingdom of Christ were not to be viewed as coming by birth but by choice, that is, free favour, and of course to Jews and Gentiles without difference, Rom. ix. 7—16, 24, 25, 26.

It is of importance to remember, that the temporal inheritance could not be given but to one only, so that, if Isaac got it, Ishmael could not; and if Jacob got it, Esau could not. Only one could be the head of that people from whom the Messiah was to come; but the spiritual inheritance may be enjoyed by countless multitudes. Here, then, as in the case of types in general, there are points of difference as well as of resemblance. To all, without exception, the spiritual blessing is preached, and all may enjoy it on believing the Gospel. Accordingly, the condemnation of the unbelieving Jews is declared to be the result of their own guilt, in rejecting Him whom God had laid as the sole foundation of acceptance with Heaven, Rom. ix. 31—33. It was this, and not some deed of exclusion, which was the cause of their ruin; for none are excluded who do not exclude themselves. The great object of the apostle in this and in the eleventh chapter, is to establish what he teaches in chap. iii. 22—24. and x. 12, 13. namely, that sal-



vation is of pure grace, and that this grace is proclaimed indiscriminately to all men, of whatever class or character. I do not mean merely that these passages are in harmony, for I need not tell you that there is no inconsistency between any one part of Scripture and another. I mean that in the former, he makes the principle, that salvation is the fruit of pure grace, to bear upon certain special reasonings of the Jews, and by a train of argument he infers from this principle, that the blessings of the kingdom of heaven are bestowed by God according to the sovereign pleasure of his goodness. The object is at once to refute the particular notions of the Jews, and to establish the general truth that in every case salvation is the gift of the self-moved love of the Almighty. In a word, it is to establish the principle taught the Israelites by Moses, when he told them, that the guilt of the Canaanites was the cause of their expulsion, and the sovereign favour of God the reason why the seed of Abraham should inherit the land, Deut. ix. 4, 5. In this sovereignty, however, there is nothing like caprice: for there are reasons in the Divine mind for every step which is taken; but in many cases they are not revealed unto us, so that we must refer them to the will of God.

The Scripture doctrine of election, then, is but another name for the doctrine of free grace. It teaches that all are righteously condemned, that none can have the smallest claim upon God, and that the divine gifts are the fruit of unmerited favour and of God's own free choice. It is introduced, therefore, for the purpose of teaching Christians to cherish humility and gratitude, by impressing them with the conviction, that to the divine mercy and free bounty they are indebted, not only for the gift of the Redeemer, but also for that gracious influence of the Holy Spirit which inclined their depraved hearts to embrace the Gospel, 1 Thes. i. 2—5. Eph. i. 3, 4. 1 Cor. i. 27—31. This latter consideration shows why it was that the apostles, when they directly introduced the subject, did it almost exclusively



in their addresses to believers, instead of dwelling on it in their general preaching.

Another reason for representing this plan as thus fixed, is, that it is calculated to confirm our faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises, and so to promote our comfort and obedience, Luke i. 55—70. Rom. i. 2. It is as if the sacred writers had said, ~~and this~~ is no upstart plan which we are preaching to you—it is not the result of momentary caprice; our Gospel proclaims an old and immutable purpose; doubt not then its accomplishment, but be animated by the sure and certain hope, that all shall be fulfilled,” Acts xxvi. 22, 23. Rom. xvi. 25, 26. 2 Cor. i. 19, 20. This is included in what is taught in Rom. xi. 29. where we are told, that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, or change, in the author of the plan of mercy; and it is included likewise in the argument in Gal. iii. 17. that the promise previously made, the law given after could not *disannul*.

We need not hesitate, then, to commit our all to the Saviour, and to confide in this plan of redemption; for it is no novel scheme, but the result of an ancient purpose, to the accomplishment of which, all the dispensations under which the church has been placed, and all the events of providence, are made to be subservient. It follows, that when we see the *freeness* of divine grace, as displayed in this plan of salvation, and the complete *security* of all who trust in it, we have obtained the knowledge of the great thing which it is the design of the Scriptures to teach us by what they say on this subject, Rom. xi. 6: Connected with this is the encouragement which Christians have to persevere in the faith and obedience of the Gospel. They are animated by the assurance thus afforded them, that they shall never be forsaken, and that their labour shall not be in vain, but shall terminate in a glorious triumph, 2 Tim. i. 8, 9, 10. 1 Cor. i. 8, 9.

Sometimes the subject is introduced to inculcate the necessity of personal holiness. Thus Christians are re-



minded that such is the character which God hath approved, and that they have been chosen by Him, not because they were, but that they might be holy, Eph. i. 6. 1 Pet. i. 2. The end of their election is holiness, and both the end and the means are included in the purposes of Heaven. This doctrine is never introduced but for practical ends, and it is perverted when taught abstracted from those distinct practical purposes. Any view of it which leads us to be negligent in duty, or to fancy ourselves free from moral responsibility, must be wrong, because it cannot be good or profitable to the characters of men.

The subject is introduced likewise, in order to encourage Christians amidst the afflictions of life. Thus, in the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle shows, that all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, are the children of God, and joint heirs with Christ of the heavenly inheritance. But as the Saviour went to glory through much tribulation, so the degree in which we shall enjoy it will be proportioned to the degree of our conformity to him, as a patient sufferer. Affliction, accordingly, has been the lot of the church of God from the very beginning; and even the apostles and others, who had the first or most excellent fruits of the Spirit, suffered the pressure of affliction, and panted for the second coming of Christ, when their salvation and bliss should be completed. In the midst of all their infirmities, however, they were supported; for all things were made to work together for good to them who loved God, and were called out of the world, according to the divine purpose of fitting them by sufferings for the heavenly kingdom. For whom he did foreknow, or previously regarded with particular favour, and designed to elevate to the most exalted bliss, he fore-appointed to sufferings; that, being conformed to the image of the first-born of the family, who was a man of sorrows, they might by this means be made meet for being conformed to him in glory. And all who shall thus be exalted he calls out of the world to confess the truth, and to



suffer for its sake ; and whom he thus calls by the belief of the truth, he justifies, by pardoning their sins, and giving them a title to eternal life ; and whom he thus honours, he glorifies at last, after having, by the sufferings of this state, tried, exercised, and strengthened the principles of piety in their minds, and so fitted them for the glory to be revealed. Such a view of the subject is well calculated to encourage Christians to the exercise of patience, and to fill them with joy in all their tribulations.

I have not the most distant intention to circumscribe the proofs of the divine sovereignty in dispensing the blessings of grace. So far from this, the view which has been given of the passages of Scripture referred to, establishes the principle that God has a right to dispense his favour as he sees good. My only wish is, to show how the Scriptures teach this important truth, and the uses to which they have applied it. It is a truth which, when Scripturally understood, is fitted to awaken the ungodly ; and, at the same time, instead of being calculated to discourage the awakened sinner, it is expressly exhibited for the very purpose of encouraging the most guilty and unworthy to cast themselves, as they are, into the arms of this sovereign and rich grace of God. It solemnly reminds the sinner, that he is entirely at the divine mercy, and strips him of every self-righteous hope, but removes every cause of despair, and invites the most self-condemned to the mercy-seat.

Such are the consolatory and practical views with which this subject is introduced in Scripture,—views far removed from abstract discussion, and from the perplexing and unavailing, and even impious, curiosity in which numbers indulge on subjects which are not among the things revealed unto us. It is edifying to observe how the apostles unite the display of free mercy and rich grace in the plan of redemption, with the salutary influence of the ills and trials of life in cherishing the principles of piety, and accomplishing the designs of God.



There is still another connection in which this subject is introduced—namely, when circumstances required that gainsayers should be told that the Gospel was certain of success, whatever they might expect, and however much they might oppose and despise it ; and when the people of God need to be comforted under the depression of the cause of truth. Of the former we have a strong example in Matth. xi. 26, 27. The things said to be “hid from the wise and the prudent of this world,” are so, not by any positive act of God upon their minds, but by the very plain and simple manner in which they are revealed. At this the self-conceited take offence ; and, in consequence, they are often left to their own vain delusions, while those whom they despise are led by the simplicity of divine truth, through the blessing of Heaven, to the knowledge and faith of the humbling doctrines of the cross. The design of our Lord was to awaken the proud and the self-sufficient to a sense of their danger, and to convince them that, if they were wise, they should be so for themselves, or they should reap all the advantage ; but that, if they scorned, they alone should bear it, or the loss should be all their own ; for of them the Saviour was completely independent.\* Thus, when the Jews were taking offence at the doctrine concerning himself as the Bread of Life, he proceeded to say, “All that the Father giveth me will come to me ; which was like saying, “Though ye believe not, but reject me, yet shall I not be wanting of subjects : my cause must prosper, and my kingdom shall be established and extended ; for such is the will of God, that my undertaking cannot be fruitless, and I shall not lose my reward, do what you may.” These thoughts animated his mind, and so ought they to encourage the minds of his people. But to show that he was far from meaning that there were any excluded from

\* The doctrine as taught by him “is not designed to supersede universal invitations ; but to provide against their being universally unsuccessful.” *Fuller's Dialogues and Essays*, page 149.



mercy who, as perishing sinners, should come to him for life, he immediately added, "And whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. In like manner he said, after the warning I have just referred to in the Gospel by Matthew, "Come unto me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is true that these truths are often elsewhere directly taught; but it is a very common thing in Scripture to introduce the same truths in some new connection, and to apply them to some special object. And hence the wonderful adaptation of the word of God to different characters and states of mind. This indeed is one special means of augmenting that practical tendency by which it is distinguished. Why then object, on this ground, to the view which has now been given of the passages in question.

Full and free forgiveness is provided for all who come to him; and however many turn to God in the name of Christ, they shall undoubtedly be accepted of him, for the sake of that atonement which he hath made for sin. The Gospel is commanded to be preached to every creature; and without a single exception, whosoever believeth it shall be saved. But while all are invited to come to the Saviour, such is the enmity of the carnal mind—such the perversion of the human heart, that sinners obstinately refuse to come. What is it, then, that can give us confidence, and inspire us with hope, in proclaiming the truth to such? Here the Scriptures direct us to the purpose of God, and encourage us, as Paul was encouraged, when it was said to him, "Be not afraid, but speak, for I have much people in this city," Acts xviii. 10.; and xxviii. 28. Isa. xlii. 4.; and liii. 10, 11, 12. The design of such passages is to show, that God hath secured the Gospel against being universally rejected, and not to represent any as excluded from its mercy. The question at last will not be, "*How were you led to come?*" but "*did you come?*" Every one who comes has the promise of being accepted. Let the encouragement thus given us to declare the



truth be received, and, at the same time, let not the door be shut unto any.

In connection with this, it may be proper to notice, that this subject is introduced to prevent the Jewish believers from being stumbled when they saw the unbelief and the consequent rejection of their kinsmen. We accordingly find, that, in order to convince them that these things were not proper causes of surprise, the apostle shows that the rejection of the Gospel by the great body of the Jews had been distinctly foreseen and predicted by God, Rom. x. 19—21.; xi. 10, 11, 20—32.; that therefore the plans of Heaven were not marred, nor had the word of God failed—neither had he been, as it were, disappointed, and laid under the necessity of calling the Gentiles in order to rectify an ill-devised scheme. So far from being a sudden or an after thought, the calling of the Gentiles was a part of his original purpose, and quite in accordance with the freeness of the Gospel.

The universal proclamation of mercy rests upon the infinite value of the atonement of Christ,—in which there is such a fulness of satisfaction as is sufficient for the salvation of the whole, were the whole world to believe in him. In consequence of the infinite worth of the sacrifice of Christ, nothing connected with the moral government of God hinders any sinner from returning to him; and upon this ground sinners are indefinitely invited to return to him through Jesus Christ; and herein lies the great difference between them and fallen angels, in the present state. The infinite worth of the death of Christ, and not their ignorance of the divine purposes, is the basis on which men are indiscriminately called on to come to the Saviour. Indeed, it were unworthy of God to make ignorance the ground of obligation. We ought not to confound a moral constitution with a merely civil transaction; and thence nicely calculate the proportion between the measure of sufferings and the extent of forgiveness; which must lead to low and contracted views of the mediation of



Christ. Sin is a crime against the Moral Governor of the world, and satisfaction for it requires to be made on public principles, and not on those which regulate private contracts among men. When Christ is said to have given himself a ransom for us, the meaning is, that, in consequence of what he has done in our behalf, we are delivered from the desert of our sins, as righteously as a debtor is delivered from the demands of law when his debt is paid. Let the atonement ever be viewed in its true grandeur, as "a general manifestation of the righteous character of God, and a general vindication of his justice in the remission of sins, sufficient to maintain his authority unimpaired, and to make his law honourable, and, from its nature, fitted to give hope to the most guilty of mankind," Luke xxiv. 46, 47. Acts x. 43. 1 Tim. ii. 6.

Let no perplexing thoughts be indulged relative to the extent of the death of Christ. The necessity for the particular nature of his atonement arose, not from the number of persons to be redeemed by it, but from the judicial effect of sin itself. Nothing less could have been sufficient for the redemption of any one of them—nor could any thing more have been requisite for the redemption of all sinners, supposing all of them were saved. And while none are justified as elect—but as mankind sinners, who are betaking themselves to this atonement and righteousness by faith; all of these are warranted to do so, wherever the Gospel comes. Such is the intrinsic sufficiency of our Lord's death, his atonement and righteousness, and there is a ground of sufficient validity and extent for the most free and extensive call of the Gospel to sinners of mankind.\* What vindicates one act of pardon, then, will vindicate many. That which sinners are called to believe remains an eternal truth, whether they credit it or not. It respects the full sufficiency of the blood of Christ to take away the sins of every child of Adam who comes to it for re-

\* *Secret Contemplations* by Adam Gib, p. 396.



lief, and the free access which every sinner has to it, however great may be his guilt and demerit, Rom. iii. 22—26. 2 Cor. v. 18—21. 1 John i. 7. and 2 John i. 2. Had more been saved than actually will be, his sufferings had not been greater than they were. There can be no defect of sufficiency in his sacrifice, for any more than infinitely meritorious it could not be, and hence the Scriptures contain the most unlimited invitations to all to confide in his atonement.

It ought never to be forgotten, that the first Christian teachers never indulged in perplexing subtleties, but were occupied with matters of vastly greater moment; and often warned their disciples against a disputatious turn of mind. They teach us that the condemnation of the impenitent at last will not turn upon any such principle as that of a deed of exclusion; for no such thing exists. Their condemnation will rest upon their wilful rejection of the Gospel, which proclaimed to them the all-sufficiency of the atonement, and through which they had been saved had they believed in it: And, on the other hand, such as are in that day called to everlasting life, will not be so, simply on the ground of some secret purpose, but as persons whose principles and character have been changed by believing in Christ; and who in consequence are children of God, and meet for the kingdom of heaven. How painful is it to hear a person, when blamed for a fault, say, "I could not get past it, for it was a part of my lot." Does not this sentiment steel the heart against a conviction of guilt?

The vessels of wrath, or the unbelieving Jews, we are told, were fitted to destruction. Now, it appears from the connection, that the verb is in the middle voice, and, of course, that the meaning is that they had fitted themselves to destruction by their rejection of the Gospel, Rom. ix. 22. And by parity of reasoning, all who ~~as~~ did the unbelieving Jews, fit themselves for perdition; for the case of the Jews is introduced to establish and illustrate a general principle. No man



will be condemned at last because God has appointed him to perdition, nor because God has not appointed him to be saved, but because of his own wickedness. The salvation of sinners is invariably ascribed to the good pleasure of the will of God—that is, his free and self-moved love, or his sovereign will, Ephes. i. 9. and ii. 4. ; but the misery of the condemned is never ascribed to his mere good pleasure, but always to their own guilt and rebellion. No man will be able to say at last, “I am doomed to misery, just because it is the will of God that I should be so.” If the condemned could persuade themselves that their doom was the effect of the mere will of a superior power, then hell would in a great measure cease to be hell. But the bitterness of their misery will arise from the conviction that they are justly condemned, and that they are only reaping the fruit of their own deeds.

The sovereignty of God should never be confounded with his supremacy. The former is the right he possesses to bestow good of any kind, in any degree, and in whatever manner he pleases, not only where there is no claim, but where there is the greatest demerit. It is as absurd, then, to speak of the sovereign justice as of equitable mercy. In punishing sin, God acts as a Judge, and according to the claims of justice and the sanction of his law ; but in the bestowing of salvation, though he acts in consistency with the law, and in a way highly honourable to justice, he acts as a sovereign benefactor who dispenses his favours according to his pleasure. The sum of the whole is, that when men suffer they do so because they have sinned, and therefore deserve punishment ; and when they are saved and blessed, they are so of free and sovereign favour. Justice gives to all, without respect of persons, what is due to them, whether it be good or evil ; but sovereignty is restricted to the communication of good only, and good too that is undeserved.

To represent God as impelling men to sin, or as dooming them to perdition, by an act of mere sover-



eighty, irrespective of their character and conduct, is deeply to reprove him. It is to proceed upon an erroneous view of what his sovereignty is, and virtually represents it as tantamount to a right to be unjust. The evil and the danger of a principle such as this I need not stop to exhibit. The friends of evangelical doctrine are often charged with holding such sentiments; but the charge is unjust.

According to the idiom of the Scripture language, words of an active signification are often used to express, not the doing of the thing said to be done, but the permission, or the prediction of it, Rev. xi. 2. and xiii. 5. Thus it is said, that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, when all that is meant is, that he suffered him to take occasion from the respite granted him, or from his being "raised up," that is, preserved, to harden his heart himself, Exod. vii. 3. compared with viii. 15—32. Rom. ix. 17, 18. It is true that God might have cut him off at the commencement of his wicked career, instead of removing from time to time the judgments which successively were poured on him, and thus in his forbearance and long-suffering sparing him. And it is also true, that had God done the former, Pharaoh would not have had the opportunity of sinning as he did, and his misery had not been so great. But was it not an act of kindness to remove the judgments which had been sent? If Pharaoh abused this to the hardening of his heart, was not he alone to blame? Might not God overrule this obstinacy of his for the manifestation of his power, in causing the world to see in the punishment of such insolent wickedness, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God? In Scripture the imperative is often used in the sense of the future, as in Gen. ix. 1. Deut. xxxii. 49, 50. Zech. xiii. 7. compared with Matt. xxvi. 31. Ezek. xxxix. 17, 18. Matt. x. 13. Now, in translating a language, the idioms of which are different from those of that in which we wish them to be understood—the idioms ought not to be retained, for if they are,



the meaning of the words is not given. Isaiah, for instance, is told to go and make the heart of Israel fat, and to make their ears heavy, and to shut their eyes; when the meaning is simply, that he should foretel that they themselves would close their ears, and shut their eyes, and harden their hearts, Isa. vi. 9, 10. Matt. xiii. 15. Acts xxviii. 26, 27. Thus, too, Jeremiah is said to have been set to overthrow and to establish nations, because he was to predict their overthrow and establishment; and Ezekiel tells us, that he came to destroy the city, when he means that he only came to foretel its destruction, Ezek. xliii. 3. In a word, when God is said to harden men, the meaning is, that he permits them to abuse his long-suffering, to the hardening of their own hearts, Rom. ii. 4, 5.; ix. 22. Neh. ix. 16, 28, 29.

You mention that the Scriptures speak of some as reprobate characters. With regard to this, it is sufficient to say, that if you examine the connections of the passages where this expression occurs, you will find, that without a single exception the reference is to what takes place in time, and not at all to an eternal transaction. The term reprobate signifies disapproved; and accordingly the word approved, is used as its opposite in 2 Cor. xiii. 7. It is used to denote vile affections, base principles, odious dispositions and conduct, which are all connected with an undistinguishing and perverse judgment, and must necessarily be abhorred of God, Jer. vi. 30. Rom. i. 28. 2 Tim. iii. 8. Titus i. 16.

The divine disapprobation of such characters is expressed by it; but even to them the Gospel is preached, and the promise of salvation will be fulfilled to them on their believing in Christ. Indeed, the term, though generally applied only to more than ordinary offenders, is applicable to all men, for all have sinned; and, in the sight of God, are consequently all disapproved.

It is deplorable to see men still, as of old, perverting



the word of God to their own destruction,—sitting at ease in sloth and in sin, and trusting in one form or another to the supposed orthodoxy of their creed. Many in this country are like the Jews, who professed to be looking for the Messiah, but rejected him when he came. Such ought seriously to be warned of their danger. The Jews, and proselytes to the profession of their faith from among the Gentiles, professed to worship the true God, and to be waiting for the promised Saviour: Now, had they improved the means of grace which they enjoyed, they would have understood in some measure his character, and would have had their minds influenced by faith in it, so that when they heard the Gospel of Jesus they would have believed in him, as the Redeemer of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. Some of them were thus influenced, and of consequence, were waiting for the consolation of Israel, and looking for redemption in Jerusalem, Luke ii. 25, 38. Such characters readily embraced Jesus as the Messiah; as soon as they heard him they knew his voice, and followed him as their promised shepherd, as he himself declared, John x. 4—14. But others though they were of the house of Israel, or proselytes to the Jewish religion, yet, not being children of God, rejected him; and hence our Lord's words, "Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" John v. 46, 47. The cause of their unbelief was solemnly declared when he said, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God," John viii. 47. Hence the following contrast is stated between the character of his people and that of his enemies:—"But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep; as I said unto you, my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," John x. 26, 27. Here their present character, and not the divine purpose, is referred to, as accounting for their conduct. In this last passage, the people of Christ are called his



sheep ; not in reference to the purpose of God, but as actually called out of the world, and renewed in their minds. They are, accordingly, represented as knowing and listening to his voice, and as following him when he calls them. In this sense the Jews in general were not his sheep, so that his meaning in the passage referred to is, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of those who are waiting for the consolation of Israel, as I said unto you (in verses 3, 4, and 5,) my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Thus we have two classes set before us,—the one having been enlightened, and in some measure sanctified, by means of the truth taught in the Old Testament, believed in our Lord as soon as they heard of his character, and had time to consider it ; as in the case of Anna, Nathaniel, and Joseph of Arimathea, among the Jews ; and Cornelius among the Gentiles. The other class, although they had the same means of grace, continued blind to the true character of God, and that of the Messiah ; and, of course, when they heard the Gospel they rejected it.

Much is said in Scripture of these two classes ; and important are the lessons which may be learned from their history. To separate these two bodies and to manifest them, was one great object of our Saviour's ministry, John ix. 39. He was like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap, Mal. iii. 2. He served as a mark for contradiction, that the thoughts of many hearts might be disclosed, Luke ii. 34, 35. His coming brought men to the test, and showed what character and disposition they were of. The feelings with which this subject is treated is a call to us seriously to ponder it.

In the thirteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, there is a contrast stated betwixt the conduct of those who contradicted and blasphemed the Gospel, and that of those who believed it. Verse 45. The former judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life—that is, by their conduct and language they passed sentence on



themselves, as unsuitable subjects for the kingdom of God. Verse 46. The term unworthy must here be explained by the sense in which the term worthy is used in the following passages:—"Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of Man," Luke xxi. 36. "That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom for which ye also suffer," 2 Thes. i. 5—11. "They shall walk with me in white for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4. In these, and such like passages, it does not mean deserving, as if the parties addressed could merit the blessings of the Gospel; for no one, not even the most holy of the redeemed, can merit eternal life; but it means suitable subjects for, or meet for the blessings mentioned. According to this, the term unworthy here must mean unmeet for, and so is descriptive of that wickedness of character which manifested that they were, in fact, his most bitter enemies, although, as possessed of the means of grace, it was humanly speaking, to be expected, that they would in principle and character be suitable subjects for the kingdom of the Messiah, and that, as such they would instantly embrace his Gospel.

It is the manner of God to speak in the manner of men, who have their expectations of fruit raised when they plant in a well-cultivated soil. Thus Moses speaks of it as a strange thing that the Israelites should continue blind and impenitent, after the means which had been used to reclaim them, Deut. xxix. 2—4. Our Lord also represents the inhabitants of the cities where he laboured, as acting most unreasonably, and as most inexcusable, because they had advantages more than sufficient to have brought them to repentance had they not wickedly abused them, Matt. xi. 20—24. They thus verified the prophetic language of Isaiah, who parabolically represents the advantage of Israel as the inclined and highly favoured vineyard of God, the abuse of those advantages, and the consequent aggrava-



tion of their guilt and punishment. God is represented by him as looking that his vineyard should bring forth grapes; but it brought forth wild grapes, Isa. v. 1—4. Nothing can be more plain than that the Jews are considered as enjoying advantages more than sufficient for their being a righteous people, had they been of a right temper. God, so to speak, had a right to expect that when his Son appeared, his own would receive him: but we see that in Antioch, as in other places, they did not, Matt. xxi. 37.

The particular object of the historian here, is to show, not so much how the people at large received the Gospel, as how it was received by those who previously were worshippers of the true God, without uniting with the Jewish people; and such there appears to have been among those called by the general name of Gentiles, in verses 42d and 48th. Proper attention to the general scope of the narrative, will serve to show that such was one principal object of the writer. Respecting the reception of the Gospel on the part of the idolatrous Gentiles; very general language is used, it being merely said, "the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region." Such then, of the worshippers of the true God as, by means of the truth taught in the Old Testament, and the grace of God accompanying it, were in readiness for the kingdom of God, because, instead of looking for a temporal kingdom, they were looking for eternal life, were, of course, disposed to receive the new covenant revelation respecting it, as soon as stated to them. In other words, they who, by the means I have mentioned, were previously possessed of principles which accorded with the clearer revelation of the apostle's Gospel, and which, of course, prepared for a cordial reception of it, at once believed it, and looked for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, so clearly brought to light through his resurrection and glory, and promised to all his people, as the gift of God through him. The reception of one



part of truth prepares for the reception of another ; and the neglect or rejection of smaller degrees of it, paves the way for an obstinate rejection of greater.

I speak at present, you will observe, of the meaning of this part of Scripture, and of its precise bearings on the subject in question ; and I wish to impress your mind and my own with a sense of the duty and importance of a conscientious improvement of the blessings we enjoy. The view I have given of the passage, is substantially that which is given by Dr. Doddridge, who, with many others, thinks that the word from which that here rendered "ordained" comes, and which in 1 Cor. xv. 15. is rendered "addicted," and in several places "appointed," generally signifies, in its passive form, "men who, having been appointed for some military expedition, and set in their proper office, as we render it, Luke vii. 8. are drawn up in battle array for that purpose. So that it expresses, or refers, he says, at once to the action of their commander in marshalling them, according to the plan he has formed in his own mind, and to their own presenting themselves in their proper places, to be led on to the intended expedition." And he adds, "that this he takes to be precisely its sense here." The passage has been used to darken the doctrine of the grace of God, by representing the disposition of mind referred to as the result of mere human agency ; but this arises from not considering the different parts of the narrative in connection with themselves and with the rest of Scripture. It is evident from Scripture, and from the nature of the case, that every one who embraced the apostle's revelation, was led by divine influence to do so, according to the gracious purpose of God to call them, and list them (as it were) in their proper places under the great Captain of Salvation. There is a wide difference, however, between the truth of a doctrine, and its being the truth directly taught in a particular passage ; and my object is to show that the passage in question by no means justifies abstract discussions on the subjects of the eter-



nal purposes of Heaven. It is one thing, too, for a particular truth to be implied in a passage, or to be legitimately inferible from it, and another for it to be the direct object of the passage to teach it. "We surely cannot suppose, that all in that place, who ever were to embrace the Gospel, did so at that time, and that their number was then summed and shut up." This were utterly at variance with the history of the progress of the truth, for we always find that some were led to embrace it at one time, and some at another.—But it is perfectly natural to conclude, that all who had previously received that measure of the Old Testament truths, which they knew, would instantly embrace the clearer discoveries of those very truths which now was afforded them.

A contrast is stated between those who, like the great body of the Jews, were looking for an earthly deliverance, and those who were waiting for spiritual and everlasting salvation and blessedness. The former took offence at the holy and humbling testimony of the apostles, but the latter found in it the very thing after which they panted; and hence they received it with joy. To them it was as the opening of a well of living water, of which they drank to the satisfying of their souls. The great body of such characters were among the Gentiles; and thus reminds us of what is stated in Matt. vii. 10. and John xii. 20, 21.

In the case of those who rejected the Saviour, there was given an awful and humbling display of human depravity in the midst of the means of grace, and amidst loud and warm professions of piety. In the case of those who embraced the Gospel, we have a display of free and efficacious grace, by which they were taught of God, and led to the Redeemer of sinners. The former perished in their sins; and particularly, because they rejected the message of reconciliation,—the latter will ever ascribe their reception of the truth to the free mercy and unmerited favour of God, "from whom all holy desires, all just counsels, and all good works, do pro-



ceed :” Not unto us, they will say, but unto thy name be the glory of the whole of our salvation from first to last. That same grace which gave the Saviour, led all of them, and still leads every sinner who is saved, to the knowledge of the truth.

This history contains a most solemn admonition to all, to see that they understand and embrace whatever measure of truth is made known to them, and to beware of hardening the heart, by perverting, resisting, or neglecting the revelation of God. There is nothing in it like saying to men, ye may believe and be saved at any time, and so leading them to take the season of repentance, as it were, into their own hand, and thus to evade immediate attention to the truth. Its language, on the contrary, is, “ Yet a little while is the light with you ; walk while you have the light, that ye may be the children of the light,” John xii. 35, 36. Jesus sat as a refiner among the Jews, and he separated between the precious and the vile ; and the same is still in a measure done by his word ; and the day is coming when a final separation shall be made, Mal. ii. 2, 3.

It will be found in that day, that there were no appointed bars, no obstacles to be surmounted in approaching the God of mercy and love, but the obstinacy and perverseness of sinners themselves,—nothing but what is properly their own, and not in any sense from God. What then ought sinners to do, but to cast themselves on the sovereign mercy of God, with whom “ there is a propitiation, that he may be feared ?” Ps. cxxx. 3, 4. The way to the Saviour is not full of obstructions, arising from some defect in his grace, his power, or the value of his work, but is quite plain and open ; and the voice of mercy is, “ Walk therein.” It is the unbelieving who, in the pride of their hearts, say, “ We will not walk therein,” Jer. vi. 16.

It is of the utmost importance to consider every subject in the connection in which it is introduced in Scripture. And a careful examination will show that there the subject of the eternal purposes of Heaven is



never introduced in an abstract manner. To allude to the well-known remark of Mr. Newton, the bearings of that subject diffused an influence over all their instructions, but were generally speaking, to be found no where in the lump. Nothing is taught in the word of God that has not a tendency to influence us practically, and to conform our character to his.

Every man who admits the omniscience and omnipotence of God, and his right to dispense his sovereign favours as he sees meet, admits principles which necessarily imply, that known unto him are all his works from the beginning; and of course admits the substance of the Scripture doctrine of election. Yet every such man feels that he is a free agent, and this feeling is stronger than a thousand arguments. If, however, we attempt fully to reconcile these things, and to find out the link which unites them, we shall find that few can follow us far, and that we often mistake mere terms for ideas. Ought we not, then, instead of perplexing ourselves and others with curious inquiries on the subject, to confine our attention to the practical purposes which both serve in the Bible.

There is a wide difference between the doctrines of the Gospel, as embodied in the Scriptures, and as exhibited in a dry abstract manner, or dwelt upon as detached dogmas. The Jews, in the days of our Lord and his apostles, gloried in their fancied privileges, as the chosen people, and hence were filled with a spirit of self-conceit, and of the most malignant contempt towards the Gentiles. They fancied themselves to be chosen not by mercy but by favouritism, and of this they boasted. Their pious ancestors, however, viewed their separation from the world in a very different light; and on them it had a humbling effect. Similar are the effects produced now by the various and opposite views which are taken of the subject in question. Let it be viewed apart from the doctrines of the cross, and the worst consequences will follow. It is well to mark the use made by the apostles of every doctrine they taught.



What is suited to one state of mind may be ill adapted to another. This consideration, no doubt, guided the spirit of wisdom in framing the general structure of revelation so as best to fit it for general use. Should a thing be in itself connected with the nature and administration of the Almighty, yet, if it cannot, in our circumstances, be of real advantage to us to dwell upon it, there is reason to expect that his word will be silent on it. \* There are, accordingly, things which, though they result from every right view of the perfections of God, the Scriptures do not, strictly speaking, teach, much less dwell upon. They leave them as they are : and, instead of occupying our minds with what is calculated to perplex, they point us to those things which at once enlighten, purify, and comfort. They lead not to the inscrutable secrets of eternity, or to what we cannot here, and perhaps not hereafter, in the least degree comprehend, but direct us to what may in a considerable measure be understood, in this life, and which, when understood, will influence our principles and character, so as to promote our conformity to the image of God, and our true and permanent blessedness.

In the history of the labours of the apostles we find them invariably dwelling on the unfettered invitations of the Gospel, as the means of bringing sinners to the Saviour. They expatiate in the most promiscuous assemblies on the perfection and all-sufficiency of the atonement—they in the most unrestricted manner call upon all to believe their testimony ; and in the name of God they solemnly assure every man, that, on believing it, he shall be saved. They never appear in the least degree fettered in proclaiming a full and a free salvation to all classes and descriptions of men. We never find them addressing promiscuous audiences, or audiences consisting chiefly of unbelievers, on the subject of the divine purposes. With these, men have nothing to do. It is for them to receive the plain declarations of Heaven relative to their guilt and demerit, and the free and suitable salvation of the Gospel. And



while, on the bare ground of the general expression of love to mankind, which appears in the Gospel that is preached to all, the sinner comes to Christ, and through Him to the feast that is prepared for all people, and so enters on the enjoyment of the blessings of mercy, he traces this change in his mind to the special or discriminating love of God towards him in particular, and to Him he gives the glory. The word of the Gospel having come to him with power, and with the demonstration of the Holy Ghost, so as to produce much assurance of its truth, he thus comes to know his election of God, which is farther confirmed by his growing sanctification, 1 Thess. i. 4—9. Let it not be forgotten, then, that this is the result of his having been led to come to the Saviour on the common warrant of the Gospel that is preached to all without any distinction.

The Gospel addresses men simply as sinners, and not as included in a particular purpose; and the faith of the Gospel is not the belief of one's election, but the belief of the testimony of God concerning the perfection and all-sufficiency of the work of the Redeemer; and if so, why perplex the hearers of the Gospel with discussions which, however different our design may be, will almost infallibly lead them to dwell on the unrevealed secrets of Heaven, rather than on the blessed message of reconciliation. Many of them can understand the difference between being saved in any measure by their own deeds, and being saved entirely through Christ, who are really incapable of at all following discussions on the subject in question. Many, too, who have received the love of the saving truth, are naturally incapable of going far into abstract reasonings on these subjects, without being stumbled, not only as to human responsibility, but even as to the doctrine of the grace of God. Now, were they treated as they are in Scripture, and not in an abstract manner, the same difficulties would by no means be felt.

It has been very justly remarked, that "Theology, properly so called, consists of necessary truths and re-



vealed truths ; its principles, in other words, consist of facts. The origin of that class of truths which arise from the ~~very~~ nature of things, is not in Revelation, though it has furnished the light by which alone they were clearly discoverable ; and supplies the strongest possible confirmation of their antecedent existence. All metaphysical speculations respecting the origin of evil, the nature of free-will, the consistency of the divine prescience with the freedom of moral agency, and, in general, the causes and essences of things, are foreign from what is substantially a system of facts, involving practical consequences of an infinite value. Take away, for instance, from the Gospel system the proposition, that all men are sinners, and it is without meaning, yet it is not responsible for the fact. The state of man is not, indeed, clearly discoverable by the light of nature, but yet true antecedently to the revelation which confirms it. Discussions, therefore, on the subjects just mentioned, are out of place when introduced in connection with the Gospel remedy, and it were well if those metaphysical, or, indeed, rather physical controversies, which have obtained regarding them, were treated as relating to a system which, though implied or assumed in revelation, has not been originated by it." It is on these principles that the Scriptures rather take certain things for granted than directly teach them, even though they arise necessarily out of the attributes and perfections of the divine nature.

The views, dear friend, now stated respecting the Scripture manner of treating those subjects, serve to show the wisdom of the ambassadors of Christ, who gave to every one his portion in due season, whether they were yet in the world, or but just called out of it, or Christians of some standing, and of considerable eminence in the faith of Christ. They considered well what was likely to be of most service, and what was likely to be injurious. What in one state of mind becomes a stimulant, may in another induce torpor. The great thing is the state of the heart, whether really



honest or the contrary. To one whose affections are in a healthful state, and whose powers are in constant action, the apostolic views of these things will be salutary. But to those who are beginning to see the light, and who, through mental infirmity, and perhaps rooted prejudices, cannot bear such discussions, they may be very stumbling and perplexing. When even a Christian sinks into a morbid state, what was once of service may become injurious. There were many things which even the disciples of Christ could not for a time bear, and the apostles fed similar characters among the first Christians with milk, and by no means with strong meat. When they declared "the whole counsel of God," they did so because they "kept back nothing that was profitable," Acts xx. 20. There was nothing like sinful compromise, but a wise adaptation to the attainments of their hearers. To such especially whose hearts have not been reconciled to God, another mode of instruction had been highly injurious. The attention of unbelievers of the Gospel, when occupied with the subjects in question, is turned from the particular truths which in a special manner are addressed to them, and which alone can reconcile the heart unto God. The justly esteemed Mr. Scott has well observed, that they are not at all proper subjects to insist on when we speak to sinners, or to newly awakened persons. It is true that we may have before us a great variety of characters at the same time, but if acquainted, as we ought to be, with the harmony and connection of the truth of the Scripture, properly impressed with the great object of our instructions, and alive to our need of divine teaching, we shall be enabled to give every one his portion in due season, without keeping back one iota of truth which our circumstances require to be declared. A rash and an unguarded manner of stating doctrines of Scripture is a very different thing from declaring "the whole counsel of God" in its harmony and just connection. The former may suit the humour of the speculatively orthodox, and the latter may call forth their spleen, but



fidelity requires that no compliance be made with prejudices such as theirs. It is possible so to misplace even the truths of the Bible, as to present a very different system from that of the apostles, and a system which will, as by an opiate, lull in the false security of a torpid, a careless, and a speculative mind.

Abstract discussions about the "purposes of God," are very different from the preaching of Christ and him crucified. They may lead to all the difficulties which have tormented speculators on the old question of liberty and necessity, but by which no man, not an incurable speculative metaphysician, was ever perplexed for a single moment. Not that the least particle of Christian truth should be sacrificed, but that whatever place any doctrines hold in the discourses of the apostles, when addressing mankind at large, should be given the same truths in our first exposition of the Gospel to uninformed characters; and that whatever place any doctrines hold in their addresses to Christians in their various situations, the same place should be given them when our object is to carry Christians gradually forward to a full acquaintance with the subjects of revelation. This amounts to nothing more than beginning with first principles; for it is with the Gospel as with the sciences, into which no person can deeply enter without being well acquainted with their rudiments. What is it but "rightly dividing the word of truth, and giving to every one his portion in due season?" 1 Tim. ii. 15. Luke xii. 42. All the truths of Scripture are important, but their importance is relative. If they are misplaced, they not only cease to profit, but prove actually injurious. They are in fact in some respects converted into errors, when taught in connections, and for purposes different from those in relation to which they are taught in the Scriptures. The subject in question ought certainly to have a place in teaching, but let it be the place that is given to it in the sacred oracles. And how small is the place which it there occupies, when compared with the constant reference which the



facts and arguments of revelation bear to the person and glory of Christ—the atonement made by his blood—justification by faith—the work of the Holy Spirit—and all the personal and relative duties of life! (Life of Mr. Scott the Commentator, p. 627, 628, and 446, 447.)

Let the inquirer, then, be directed, in the first instance, to those passages of Scripture which treat most particularly of the state and character of man, and of the nature and design of the Gospel. • If he perceive the genuine glory of the message of mercy, without perplexing himself with untaught questions, he will rest satisfied that a revelation such as this could only have been given with the design of saving every one who should become really acquainted with it. Not that he ought to rest in first principles, but that he should be well informed in them, as the best means of forwarding his progress from them to perfection. The great truths of the Gospel are brought down to the capacity of the weakest, but their glory is seen in gradually bringing the child to maturity of knowledge.

I am far from meaning that maturity of Christian knowledge consists in being able to discuss the questions which have been agitated about what relates to the purposes of Heaven. This were to fritter down the stately and well-compacted body of Christianity to the knowledge of a number of insulated metaphysical points, which, in this abstracted form, so far from having a salutary influence on mankind, can hardly fail to be pernicious. I mean, that Christians should study the oracles of God, and advance from elementary principles to the knowledge of the whole branches of the Gospel system, in all their bearings and connections. This ought to be done with a profound prostration of mind before God, and with that chastened feeling and deep humility which lead to implore illumination from above, and to maintain a constant dependence on the aid of the Divine Spirit.

With regard to what respects the purposes of God,



it is but little that we can know of them. Our excursions are here in particular very narrowly bounded. When we consider that the nature of God passes our most exalted comprehension, we must be convinced that the analogies taken from human counsels, purposes, and contrivance, to illustrate his modes of knowledge and procedure, are very inadequate to the subject. It is true that the information afforded us by these means, is just so far as it goes, but it must be very imperfect. We are therefore cautioned against discussions which are too high for us. An ungoverned curiosity, and a lofty pride of understanding, are as offensive to God as an indulgence in sordid and gross pleasures; and the subject of the former must, in order to the enjoyment of heaven, be made humble and modest, as well as the slave of the latter must be purified. It is at once the duty and the privilege of a Christian to repose in the full confidence of faith upon the unerring rectitude, wisdom, and goodness of God, whatever difficulties he may feel on the subjects in question.

Let me exhort you to mark what subjects the Scriptures dwell most frequently and largely upon, and give them the chief place in your thoughts and conversation. The great design of the Gospel is to restore us to spiritual health; and to this end its different parts are admirably adapted. It is, however, of great moment that they be properly blended together. If the different ingredients of a medicine are not properly mixed and proportioned, its virtue is lessened, if not totally lost; but if all its ingredients are properly compounded, there is full scope given for the exercise of its whole medicinal qualities. If, in like manner, the doctrines of Scripture are viewed in their proper connection, they will produce and cherish the health of the soul, but if otherwise, they will induce and cherish spiritual disorders. It is with the soul as it is with the body; the preservation of a healthful constitution requires much caution and care; for some things which at one time are useful, may at another be injurious; and hence the need of



wisdom in applying the truths of Scripture to the varied and ever-varying circumstances of the present state. I am, &c.

## LETTER XXVII.

### ON THE MAINTENANCE OF CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE.

The doctrine of the Gospel, the medicine of the soul—The necessity of constancy in the faith—The danger of trusting to past attainments—Mistaken views of faith in some—The proper manner of treating the dejected—The connection between consolation and holiness—The influence of disease on the mind—Importance of uniting jealousy of ourselves, with confidence in God—The ground of access to God ever the same—Remarks on 1 John iii. 21.—The necessity of uniting the use of means, with simplicity of dependence upon God.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You will remember the conversations that we have had, on some of the difficulties which are met with in the Christian course, and particularly on the means of maintaining Christian confidence. Allow me, with a particular view to the latter subject, to recall to your remembrance the principal observations which were suggested on these occasions.

You have often mentioned the medicinal power of the Gospel in first restoring health to the benumbed and perverted powers of the soul, and then nourishing and supporting it. Now, this spiritual health is not the ground of a Christian's hope, under a view of guilt. The foundation of our peace is the same from first to last; it is the atonement of Christ. Not only is our cure at best imperfect, but though it were perfect, it could not expiate sin. The only scriptural confidence which the new character of a Christian can give, is similar to that of a man who, finding his health improving by the use of a particular medicine or regimen, is satisfied of the advantage of the system, and perse-



veres in its use. His health, he knows from experience, improves or declines, according as he follows or neglects the prescribed remedy ; and his growing confidence in its efficacy, excites to the unremitting use of it.

In like manner must we seek deliverance from the disease of sin, by continuing in the firm faith of the medicinal truth of the Gospel. If faith be the conviction of things we do not see, the conviction must be ever maintained ; for if not upon the mind at the moment, we cannot be said to have it. Forgetfulness then, is, in many respects the same thing with an opposite conviction. The belief of yesterday, if confined to it, will not benefit us to-day. He who believes, feels the power of the truth, not he who merely has believed.

When the divine righteousness, in the full and free redemption of the guilty, through the blood of Christ, was first beheld by us, the love of God was kindled in our hearts. Our happiness arose from that truth which answered the painful question, "How can a sinner be justified before God?" We maintained a holy jealousy of every thing that threatened to deprive us of our only hope. Faith wrought by love, and love produced cheerful and self-denied obedience. A deep sense of guilt and unworthiness endeared to us the love of God, which had met us in all our wretchedness, and had kindly and freely saved us. But alas ! our mutable and fluctuating heart deceived us ! Though, like Israel, we had sung the praises of God at the Red Sea, we "soon forgot his mighty works." We gradually lost a proper sense of our sinfulness, pollution, and danger, and of the love and mercy of our God. Our love to him naturally declined ; and though the truth was not denied, it came to be held as a matter of speculation. The works which formerly flowed from love to Him who loved us, and gave himself for us, now proceeded from some self-righteous principle. Our sufferings came to be considered as in some sense meritorious, and did not as before spring from love to the Man of Sorrows, and from the hope of sharing in his glory. Now, if



any thing like this has taken place, have we not reason to be alarmed? Ought we not to examine into the root of the evil? If we do so, we shall find, that it is a ceasing to live constantly by the faith of the Son of God.

The sacrifice of Christ ought ever to be the food of our souls. If we withdraw from it, and trust to the degree of spiritual health which we think we have attained, we act as a man would do, who, because he is in health and vigour, should dream of supporting his existence by the stock of life he already enjoys. The very essence of our spiritual life is our love to God; the enjoyment of his favour as our chief joy; happiness in that in which he delights, and satisfaction in the privilege of fellowship with him, and conformity to him. Now this cannot be maintained if we feed not upon the Gospel of Christ. When we leave it, we exclude ourselves from the fellowship of Him who is our life. We cease to be influenced by the only motives which can keep in the way of holiness and of peace. Sin, of course, gains the ascendancy, and the power of temptation is augmented. From this state of declension we cannot be recovered, but by returning to the sacrifice of the Redeemer, and abiding in the faith of the healing doctrine of the cross.

It is unhappily supposed by many, that a declension from their first love is just what is to be expected in Christians; and that, being a thing of course, it therefore need not cause fear. That Christians are naturally prone to decline from God is too true; but that they ought to be comforted in such circumstances is false. Many, indeed, leave their first love; but is it therefore right to affirm that it merits little regard? Some, again, have appeared to be Christians who never were so in reality, and the fall of such need not surprise us. Mistakes on this subject have arisen from not considering, that the lively exercise of the affections, when newly excited, and accompanied with poignant sensations, is a different thing from the exercise of the same affections



when settled into a habit, and operating as a principle at once powerful and tranquil. The effect of the first impressions of the truth may be such, that physical, as well as moral causes, will not allow it to be permanent. The individual may be so affected, as for a time to be incapable of attending to the ordinary concerns of life : and this, I need not say, is a state which is far from being adapted to our situation in the world, and therefore it cannot be essential to piety. There is often too, in such circumstances, more that is superficial than there is of solid principle. There is frequently, for example, great ignorance of the heart, and of the deceitfulness of sin, and very defective views of the Gospel of peace. When the knowledge of these, and of kindred subjects, continues to advance, the principle of sacred love strikes its roots the deeper, and its fruits become more mature. There is more simplicity of confidence in God—more of a filial disposition towards him ; and of a conscientious regard to his will, accompanied with genuine contrition, and great self-jealousy.—There is less of a censorious and inconsiderate temper,—less of an obtrusive and talkative humour, and more of a candid, humble, and cautious spirit. Love has not declined, but it “abounds in all knowledge, and in all judgment.” Now, this state ought not to be confounded with religious declension, as, through an error of judgment, has been sometimes the case.

This is quite a different thing from saying, that what is really a declension from our first love, is a mere matter of course. The Ephesians were greatly blamed by our Lord for having declined\* in their fervour, Rev. ii. 4, 5. Shall we then sanction lukewarmness on principle, and flatter those who ought to be awakened from their false dreams of security ? Far be it.

No fancied increase of knowledge, or correctness of views, will supply the place of genuine love ; and care ought to be taken that we mistake not true and acceptable fervour for irregular warmth. There are errors on this side as well as on the other. It becomes us, when



at any time we have fallen, "to remember from whence we have done so." We ought, like Israel, to remember our original state of guilt and unworthiness, that we may be humbled, Deut. xxxii. 15, 16. This Paul never forgot, and the remembrance of it he pressed upon his brethren, Titus iii. 3. 1 Cor. xii. 2. Ephes. ii. 11, 12. We ought to remember the blessedness we tasted when first relieved by the atonement,—the mingled emotions of joy and of sorrow which were excited in us when we looked on him whom our sins had pierced; and how our hearts were melted when, from a sense of much forgiveness, we loved much, Gal. iv. 13—16. Heb. x. 32—34. Acts ii. 44—47. Such reflections will lead us to remember the temptations, snares, and deceits which called forth and cherished a spirit of self-dependence, which darkened our views of the grace of the Gospel, and which sunk us into a state of coldness, or lukewarmness towards God, and things unseen and eternal. Feeling the instability and deceitfulness of our hearts, we shall be the more eager to keep firm hold of the divine testimony. In a word, we shall feel that we must be coming daily to the Saviour. This, it is true, is humbling, but the more suited it is to our state and character. We are apt to think, that in the course of our progress, a time shall come, when we shall not be under the necessity of doing so; but this is an error.—Through life we shall have to come, to the cross as at first. This necessity is far from being incompatible with enjoyment. The fear of death would keep Noah from leaving the ark, and plunging into the waters, but would not in the least mar his happiness while in the place of safety. In the same way, the fear of perishing keeps a Christian from departing from Christ, but does not mar his peace or his joy while he continues in the faith of Him.

The primitive Christians dwell upon the great truths of the Gospel as the very meat and drink of their souls. When the attention is turned to ourselves, and to our feelings, exclusive of the things in the truth, which



should make us feel, and which alone can produce proper sensations, we act very differently from them. Their devotion was not like that which has a hold of the imagination, or of the feelings alone,—it was founded on the conviction of the understanding, and the sanctification of the affections. They speak of their sensations, but not apart from the revelation of God, which is the seed of all their true piety, and was the constant delight of their hearts. Accordingly in the most animated descriptions of the feelings of the apostles, we have distinctly set before us the truths which made them feel. It becomes us to act in spiritual things as we do in the concerns of this life. We never dream of being nourished by ruminating on the sensations of hunger and thirst, or by conversing about them, but have recourse to such food and drink as are suited to our wants. Neither do we expect the cure of our bodily maladies by merely brooding over them, or conversing about them, without having recourse to the appropriate medicines. On similar principles, it is by a constant attachment to the great truths of the Gospel, as the bread and the water of life, and the remedy for our souls, that we shall be invigorated and enlivened. If, through the power of temptation—the influence of a self-righteous spirit—the prevalence of sin—the harassing effect of sorrow and affliction,—in a word, through whatever cause we have lost the enjoyment of comfort, it can never be recovered but by the renewed exercise of faith in the atonement. Many in such circumstances err greatly, in spending that time in reflecting on past sensations, which had better be spent in looking afresh to that truth which is the spring of genuine purity and happiness. Our inability to decide upon the nature of what is past is no reason why we should not now go to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

The recollections of past sensations and deeds will generally be but indistinct, and of course, incapable of yielding the solid satisfaction which arises from the present active and constant exercise of the principles of



genuine religion. Besides, were they of the most vivid description ; and were we satisfied that past sensations were the fruit of divine grace, our reflections on them would only profit us in proportion as they led us at present to look anew from ourselves to the Gospel of peace ; for nothing can supply the want of a present persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, and present dependence on its blessed import.

I am far from meaning that we ought not to look back at all to our past courses.—There is a wide difference between reflecting on past sensations, as an inducement to “repent, and do our first works,” and that we may be encouraged to confide in that blessed sacrifice which formerly gave us rest ; and doing so, to calm a sense of guilt, and to strengthen a hope founded on such sensations.—The former is salutary, but the latter is deeply injurious.

If we endeavour, by reflecting on what is past, to maintain a persuasion that we are the children of God even when we are lukewarm, or quite cold in his service, his Spirit confirms not this confidence by his word. The prevalence of worldly lusts and indifference towards spiritual things cannot dwell in the same heart with the Spirit of God. If sin prevail—if carnality and the love of the world are predominant in the heart, we must greatly dishonour Him by a fearless assurance that all is safe. If the word of God is not now abiding in our minds we cannot have any well-grounded confidence that we are saved by it ; for we are made partakers of Christ only if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, Heb. iii. 14. There is nothing in this calculated to induce us to distrust God ; but there is every thing fitted to lead us to distrust ourselves. The Gospel is not obscure, however beclouded it may have been to us. It is still open for our relief and free for our use.—The merciful language of God is, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings,” Jer. iii. 22. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and



to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John i. 9. The Lord will preserve believers to eternal life, but he does it "through faith." When he restores their souls, it is not merely their consolation that he renews,—it is their spiritual health. When he heals their backslidings, he makes them fruitful in the works of righteousness, for he is as the dew to their souls, at once refreshing and fructifying the heart, Hosea xiv. 4—6.

I beg you to take notice, that there is nothing in these statements at all like to the notion, that when our minds are lively, and our affections warm, we need not faith, because we then live by sense; but that when our hearts are cold and lifeless, then is the time to live by faith,—as if Christian feeling and faith were opposed to each other; and as if the latter were a persuasion that we are the children of God. To say, that however bad the state of our minds may be, we ought instantly to believe in the atonement of Christ, and to come to him in the confidence of obtaining mercy, is quite different from saying, that when we have no reason to conclude that we are Christians, we ought then to maintain the confidence that our state is safe. The latter is not to believe God, for he has testified no such thing. Unbelief is not calling our piety in question; it is calling in question the truth of the divine testimony. If the Galatians, when Paul stood in doubt of them, had maintained the confidence that all was well with them, would they not have resembled the Jews, who boasted of their assurance that they were the children of God, at the very time that they were opposing his truth, and rebelling against his authority? Gal. iv. 20. John viii. 54. This was not faith, but unfounded presumption. It is true, that our questioning if we are indeed the children of God, may be traced to unbelief, because, if our faith in the Gospel were steady and active, it would put an end to hesitation on the subject; but it is not on this account unbelief itself, any more than penitence is sin, because it cannot be exercised but in consequence of sin.



It is much to be regretted, that an opposition between faith and sense, or, in other words, between faith and Christian feeling, should ever have been so stated as to lead any into the dangerous mistake of supposing that the latter is unconnected with the former, and even supersedes the necessity of it. Occasion has thus unhappily been given for reproaching Christian devotion and enjoyment as irrational and wild enthusiasm. Nothing can be more unfounded than such reproaches. The joy of a Christian is doubtless felt and sensible; but it is not a mere sensation, it is rational joy. So far from being separated from, or unconnected with faith, it springs from it, and is proportioned to its vigour and steadiness. He who enjoys it, can give a reason for the hope that is in him, 1 Pet. iii. 15. His joy is "the joy of faith," Phil. i. 25.; for every thing in genuine piety is characteristic of "the spirit of a sound mind," 2 Tim. i. 7. His love to God is not an unaccountable sensation, but a principle; implanted indeed by a heavenly influence, but by suitable means. The faith from which all his comfort springs, is not like the vain daring of the Egyptians, who, without any divine declaration to rest on, ventured into the Red Sea. It is like the confidence of the Israelites, who, in passing through the waters, rested on the explicit declaration and promise of God. It is proper, however, to state that the expression—sensible comfort, is often used to signify that enjoyment which a Christian has in a consciousness of the healing influence of the Gospel, as distinguished from that which a man has when viewing himself as a stranger to this healing influence; he goes as a sinner to the Saviour, on the ground of the infinite merit of his sacrifice, and of the unfettered invitations he has addressed to all indiscriminately to come to him for rest. It is also used to denote that flow of the spirits, which in certain constitutions and circumstances accompanies the influence of the Gospel. But there may be a settled peace and joy possessed, where, owing to constitutional causes or other things, there is little of



this kind of excitement. These things then are quite distinct, and ought not to be confounded.

You ask, my dear friend, how a person should be treated, who fears, that in his profession of religion he has been deceiving himself with delusive hopes? When a professor of religion, who had concluded that he was a believer of the Gospel, comes to question if he has indeed believed it, his case demands particular attention. In vain do his friends endeavour to console him, by reminding him of what they think good about him, of past instances of religious services and enjoyments, or of the length some have gone astray who were yet the people of God; as if these things could form a pillow for repose. Any peace got in this way, will be like the momentary ease derived from opium, which leaves the disease as it was. Let it never be forgotten, that the indulgence of sin, and departure from the truth, must deprive of scriptural comfort. An example of the effect of the latter we have in the Galatians, who, when, they departed from the Gospel, preached to them by Paul, lost their former blessedness. And as to the former, distress must follow the predominance of sin, the conscious workings of the love of the world, and the prevalence of carnality of heart. He would only aggravate his sin, and dishonour God still more, by a fearless confidence that he is living by faith notwithstanding. It were extremely dangerous to heal his wound slightly, by saying peace, when there is no peace. Let him be probed to the quick, by being seriously called on to consider wherein he has departed from the truth, and how far he is living in the neglect of some known but disagreeable duty, or in the practice of some known sin. If the truth is not retained in the mind, or if some error respecting it be embraced, distress of spirit must as necessarily follow, as darkness does the setting of the sun, unless the heart be very hardened indeed. Sin again darkens the understanding, and alienates the affections from things holy and spiritual, sears the conscience as with a hot iron, and renders the transgressor



utterly incapable of enjoying the consolations of the Comforter. Safety, indeed, may be earnestly desired, but holy intercourse with God, and spiritual enjoyments, are not. In such circumstances, let the disorder be fully exposed, and every false hope shaken to the foundation. The fear that the divine word will fail, is a very different thing from the dread of being deceived by our own hearts. The more that we distrust our deceitful hearts,—the more shall we trust in the divine testimony.

When the cause of distress is, that the truth has been forsaken, it is of the first importance to direct the distressed to the only balm for his wound, and to the immediate exercise of faith in the atonement. Though no particular known transgression has been indulged in, the faith of the Gospel has been declining. The hopes of the mind cannot be solid, unless they are built on the work of the Saviour. They are often however too easily raised or sunk, according to the pleasant and agreeable nature of our feelings on the one hand, and their dull and unpleasant nature on the other. The reason is, that we look more to our feelings as such, and apart from the truth, than to the great cause of all proper feeling, and the foundation of all true confidence. The immutability of the divine faithfulness and love, as manifested in the Gospel, and the absolute perfection of the work of Christ, are not sufficiently perceived. Error is mixed with truth in our minds, so that the real glory of the Gospel is but partially seen, and of course it has not that influence upon us which it otherwise would. Finding, or at least fearing that we have been deceiving ourselves, we act as if there were no hope. Because we see nothing good in ourselves, and so are stripped of all hope from that quarter, we feel as if there were no means of relief in another, and our spirits sink into despondency, and all comfort is refused. Often in such cases the mind is filled with the most tormenting anguish, and the darkest gloom, because a blow has been struck at its self-righteous confidence, while the true



ground of acceptance has not been perceived. In such circumstances, our immediate duty is to look to the blessed Gospel of Christ, and contemplate the Saviour as he is there exhibited.

The ground of acceptance revealed in the Gospel, takes it for granted, that he who builds upon it has a deep conviction, that he needs the full extent of the redemption of Christ, and that his confidence in it needs not thereby be shaken. It is easy to maintain that hope which arises from slight views of sin, but it requires a conflict to preserve at once a just sense of our guilt, and full confidence in the Saviour. We are prone to seek a false peace, and naturally averse to the humbling means by which the Gospel imparts consolation. The solidity of our comfort, and the progress of our sanctification, depend, however, on the simplicity of our dependence on the cross. This makes the soul not only to allow its guilt, but to shudder at sin; to wonder that ever it could have been guilty of it, while, at the same time, it is happy in a sense of pardon, and in the hope of eternal life.

When distress of mind arises from the indulgence of sinful habits, the subjects of it ought to be affectionately told, that the indulgence of evil tempers, worldly cares, and sinful practices and neglects, grieve and quench, and in fact resist, the Spirit of God, Eph. iv. 30, 31. 1 Thess. v. 19. Acts vii. 51—53. David felt this when he said, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me," Ps. li. 11. It will not do to speak of darkness of mind and insensibility of heart, in relation to divine things, as mere infirmities, and of cold affections, and slothful and inefficient desires, as mere matters of course. There is too often a secret feeling, as if, though it is becoming to complain of such things, there is no very urgent necessity to endeavour to remedy them. Christians are called to a life of watchfulness, circumspection, and diligence, and are warned of the necessity of pressing forward as through a crowd of opposition, of striving as in



a close combat, and of labouring to enter into the rest of God, 1 Cor. xvi. 13. Eph. vi. 10—18. Now if professors of religion shall substitute for these exercises of self-denial, verbal complaints of their insufficiency and inability, and call such lamentations exercises of piety, is it surprising that they should be strangers to the comfort which the Lord hath connected with righteousness? If the man who was once serious, watchful, and diffident, has become the prey of levity, sloth, and presumptuous confidence, though he may for a time obtain a delusive peace, he will ultimately find, that true joy is connected only with holy and humble fellowship with God, and is utterly incompatible with a life of sin. It is necessary to sound in such a man's ears the awakening alarm of the divine threatenings against backsliders, and to call upon him to "repent and do his first works."

If these admonitions are blessed to his soul, care ought to be taken that his unbelief do not lead him to distrust God as to future circumstances, by indulging a distrustful dread that temptation may arise which will deprive him of his valued mercies, and plunge him in perdition. It is true, that the temptations and changes of this ensnaring world ought to make us jealous of our own hearts, but they should always be viewed in connection with the delightful declaration of the Saviour, that "his grace is sufficient for us." We are called, then, in relation to spiritual as well as temporal things, to mind only the things of the present day, and to leave the concerns of to-morrow to the wise and the gracious disposal of our Lord. The heart will thus rest upon a firm foundation, and will enjoy rest, while, at the same time, it will be stimulated to the greatest activity.

I speak, you will observe, of a Christian who, although he is conscious of daily failures in obedience, is upon the whole, walking in the light, and so has fellowship with God. While from day to day, he confesses sin and implores forgiveness through the heavenly Advocate, he does so with fervour and contrition of spirit,



and the renewed mercy of his God binds him the more to him, and inspires him with a growing aversion to whatever would offend him.

It is a sad abuse of the merciful constitution of the Gospel, when the prayers and confessions of a professing Christian become matters of form ; when, on being convicted of sin, he says, in cold blood, and with complete indifference, "There is forgiveness with God," and "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." Is this the lesson taught by the condemnation of the angels that sinned, the destruction of the old world, and the cities of the plain, the fall of the Israelites in the wilderness, and, above all, by the death of the Redeemer? To all of these are Christians pointed in Scripture, that they may learn that *their* God is a consuming fire, 2 Peter ii. 4—9. Jude i. 5. Heb. xii. 29. They are thus solemnly told, that God will not trifle with sin, even in his own people, and that the more fully they understand the Gospel, and the more that they live by faith in the atonement, the more will they see the danger of sin, and the more holy and circumspect will be their deportment. Well, indeed, may we be warned against departing from the living God, through an evil heart of unbelief.

When the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ, and discovers their reality and glory to the mind, the faith of the heart is commanded. We can no more doubt the truth of the Gospel, than we can doubt the existence of the sun when it shines before us, and our eyes are dazzled with its beams. The evidence of the truth strikes the mind with overpowering effect ; and there is a glory and an excellency seen in it, which transforms the soul into its likeness. When the mind is thus absorbed in the contemplation of the Redeemer, the blessed effect is growing and satisfying gladness. When the heart is thus enlarged, we go to our heavenly Father with the utmost confidence, and pour out our hearts before him whom our souls love. Prayer is felt to be a privilege, and we delight in it as a means of fel-



lowship with him. Such, however, is the deceitfulness of the heart, that when thus happy we are in danger of being too much engrossed with our sensations themselves, and of forgetting their entire dependence on the gracious truths of the Gospel, and the gracious influence of the Spirit. Pride is thus excited and cherished. There is nothing in the communications of divine grace, that is, of itself, calculated to fill us with pride. On the contrary, all of them are fitted to promote humility. But when the mind dwells only on the gift and on the circumstance that to us the blessing has been imparted, a spirit of pride may be engendered. There was nothing in what Paul saw in the third heavens, that of itself could foster pride, but when he began to dwell on the mere circumstance, that to him and not to others this favour had been granted, his mind would be turned from the objects he had seen, and so might be lifted up above measure, 2 Cor. xii. 7. David said in his prosperity, "I shall never be moved." He not only expected that he should always enjoy the same temporal prosperity, but he preferred the gift to the Giver, the streams to the fountain, Psalm xxx. 6, 7. He speaks as if past and present communications from God would be sufficient to his happiness, without any constant or fresh supply; as if he could now stand without additional aid from above. Now, when a Christian is wholly occupied with his joyful feelings, and dwells only on the circumstances, that now he sees the truth clearly, or feels its convincing and animating power strongly, and ceases to keep his eye on the great object of faith, and to retain a firm hold of the truth itself, he falls into an error of the same kind. The consequence is, that he declines in faith, and in true joy, for though a kind of warmth and comfort be felt, they are not genuine. He has ceased to draw from the fountain, and the stream is, of course, dried up. It becomes him to ponder on the cause of his declension, to be sensible of his sin, and to seek again his departed joys.

God has promised his people consolation; but, as was



necessary from the very nature of the thing, he has connected it with our continuing in the faith and obedience of the Gospel, Psalm cxix. 165. Isaiah xlviii. 17, 18. John xiii. 17.; xiv. 15, 16, 21, 23. xv. 7—11. James i. 21—23. The indulgence of any evil temper grieves the Spirit of God, and causes him to withdraw. As men express their displeasure by looking away from one who has offended them, so the withdrawment of former displays of kindness because of sin, is signified by the hiding of the face of God, Deut. xxxii. 20. Ezek. xxxix. 23—29. Micah iii. 4. Isaiah lix. 2. When the Saviour became answerable for guilt, even from Him did God hide his face. It is true that the Church, under persecution for righteousness sake, says to him, “Wherefore hidest thou thy face? But this expresses not what was really, but what was apparently the case, for we find that Paul when he applies this passage to himself and his brethren, is exulting in the thought, that nothing whatsoever could separate them from the actual benefit of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, Ps. xlv. 24. Rom. viii. 35—39. This chastisement then is an instance of salutary severity used for the recovery of such as have wandered from God.

If professing Christians habitually neglect what they ought to observe, if they cleave to what they ought to abandon, or do what they ought to shun, what can they expect but to be void of that comfort to which other things are preferred? If their regard to the blessings of divine grace is not strong enough to reconcile them to that holy, humble, and self-denied course with which the enjoyment of them is connected, they may rest assured that they are far from valuing them as they ought. There is, in such cases, an evident reluctance to make the sacrifices which are indispensably necessary to the enjoyment of Christian comfort, which shows, that much as the want of it is in words lamented, the heart is too much set upon the world. The fact is, that the great thing desired by such characters, is to be able to entertain the assured hope of at last reaching heaven, without



parting unreservedly with every idol. How different their spirit from that of those who find enough in the favour and fellowship of Christ to occupy the whole heart, and who, from a sense of happiness in his service, abandon all that is incompatible with the much valued blessing ! In the very nature of things, we can have no fellowship with the God of light, if we walk in darkness.

I would here remind you, my dear friend, that the want of enjoyment is sometimes owing to a constitutional tendency to melancholy and to bodily disease. There are disorders which produce great dejection, and lowness of spirits, and which affect the hopes and the fears both respecting time and eternity. In such circumstances, it is not enough that the truth be stated ; means must be used to better the health. A proper attention to all the means necessary to restore vigour to the bodily frame, is an important part of Christian duty. The mind gets enfeebled by disease, and the sufferer becomes incapable of fixing his attention on the object of faith with any degree of distinctness or composure : he cannot engage with his wonted fervour in the exercises of devotion, for however animating in themselves, in his circumstances they are very exhausting ; and his wavering mind being disturbed by images, perhaps of the most gloomy description, he is disposed to indulge in dismal apprehensions ; and, in particular, to conclude that his situation is the result of grievous declension from God, and that he is left to reap the fruit of his transgressions. Now, all the while nothing has happened to him, “but what is common to man.” The most eminent servants of God are not promised exemption from any of the afflictions to which flesh is heir, for “one event is to the righteous and to the wicked.” If we connect this consideration with the promises which ensure comfort in the way of obedience, we shall perceive the consistency between such afflictions and the faithfulness of God. The Gospel could never be designed to remove physical disorders ; and the promises of consolation while we walk



in it, must be understood in a sense agreeable to its nature and object. It is true, that as "a merry heart doth good like a medicine," so the joy of the truth may in a measure influence the health. But as there are maladies which deprive of ordinary mirth, by incapacitating the mind for performing its proper functions, so there are disorders which impede the exercise of Christian principles. Though the judgment of the afflicted allows the truth of all that an enlightened Christian states from the Scriptures, the heart fails to receive the comfort of the message. So long as the mind of Job was unimpaired, he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly; but when, through the effect of circumstances and disease, his spirit was broken, and when, both while asleep and awake, his wavering mind was disturbed by dismal and gloomy images, he indulged in the most melancholy thoughts, and spake unadvisedly with his lips. His infirmities, though not in themselves sinful, became an inlet to evil; for, though he was not the character which his friends supposed him to be, he certainly in some measure erred, as otherwise the Almighty would not have reproved him. It is matter of great consolation, that He who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust, distinguishes between what is the fruit of infirmity, and what is the fruit of sin; as we see in his address to his three friends, of whom God says, that they had not spoken of Him the thing that was right, as his servant Job had, Job xlii. 7.

It is possible, indeed, dear friend, that the state of the mind may be attributed to a bodily cause, when it is not really owing to it; but what is there about which errors may not be committed? And, therefore, though this is a strong reason for caution, it is none for discarding a fact, and refusing to learn from it what it is fitted to teach. If the mind is quite susceptible of impressions from worldly things, corresponding with their nature, and not so in regard to spiritual objects, then certainly the cause is not an infirmity, but a morally evil principle. This, therefore, requires particular attention.



I beg you to remember, in connexion with this, that though, as we advance in life, Christian principle may become more vigorous, it may not always produce the same warmth or tenderness of feeling. A change in the constitution, or the decay of animal nature, sufficiently accounts for this. A similar effect is produced in regard to worldly objects ; for even when we are deeply engaged with them, there is not in advanced life the same degree of liveliness in our feelings, as was in our early days. The same principle is applicable to different kinds of natural temperament. Particular circumstances, when joined with certain constitutional tendencies, will sometimes cause one part of the truth to impress the mind more than other parts of it ; and at such times there may, for example, be such a view had of the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of God, as will lead to bow submissively to his will, while there is not that view of his whole character which fills with unutterable joy.

The reality and the vigour of our piety are not to be judged of, therefore by the ebbs and flows of our animal spirits. Love to the truth may operate at one time with more tender and affectionate feelings than at another ; but in the latter case, it may be as apparent in the solidity of our attachment, in the cheerfulness and activity of our obedience, and in our patience under suffering. It were very wrong to confound the latter state of mind with religious declension, for it manifests genuine love no less than the former. In this way is the life of religion often maintained to old age, and thus “ while the outward man decays, the inward man is renewed day by day.” Frames and feelings pass away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. The soul may have good hope through grace, and may be able calmly and peacefully to step into eternity, though nothing like rapture is enjoyed.

There is nothing in these statements inconsistent with the fact, that all positive enjoyment must be sensible. Without some happy sensations we cannot, you know, have consolation or joy. In so far as the mind is de-



livered from the slavish fear to which it was subject, and has the expectation of future bliss, there is a degree of positive comfort enjoyed. Some who use the expression "the comforts of sense," mean by it strong consolation, in distinction from small degrees of it; but would it not be better to employ the proper terms? Why use the language which is frequently understood to mean that the comfort of sense is in its nature opposed to the comfort of faith? Incorrect modes of expression on this subject have sometimes arisen from not sufficiently adverting to the difference between imparting positive consolation, and preventing affliction from reaching a particular height. Suppose two afflicted persons to be equally destitute of positive enjoyment, and the distress of the one to be left to its natural progress and issue, while that of the other is prevented by some friendly interposition from proceeding farther than a certain point,—the one would utterly sink under the weight of his calamity,—the other would not. Now it were improper to say that the latter had comfort, though not of a sensible kind, for he had no positive comfort at all; because the interposition in his favour had operated, not by imparting positive joy, but merely in preventing a particular measure of positive distress. It is true that his painful feelings would be far inferior to those of the man who sunk under his affliction; but this is quite compatible with his being equally a stranger to positive joy.

You know that the animal part of our constitution may be heavily afflicted, while the spirit is joyful and happy: and that on the other hand the spirit may be deeply distressed, while the animal part of our frame, if not altogether unaffected, is not so much afflicted as to be incapable of affording any aid to the mind. The body and the animal spirits influence the mind, and the latter, again, influences the former in ways which we cannot explain. But the fact shows that there is room for the exercise of an agency which may operate in either increasing or diminishing affliction, and in neutralizing its influence. Now in certain kinds of affliction, God



may interpose to prevent the trial from reaching such a height as the sufferer would be unable to bear; or (which comes to the same thing, as to the effect) to support him so as to keep him from utterly sinking under it, while his interposition may produce no positive joy, but have the negative effect, only of preventing a particular kind or degree of distress, 1 Cor. x. 13. This is particularly the case in those maladies which deject the spirit. In such circumstances, there may be communications from God, of which the individual is not aware. If this were what is meant by communion with him, which is not of a sensible nature, then the sentiment is just, though, as the language has been abused, it were better, perhaps, to use another mode of expression.

The subject is illustrated by the example of the Saviour. To him the sun of consolation was at certain times totally eclipsed, and he endured the entire absence of divine joy; but he even then was so supported as to be kept from utterly succumbing under the pressure of his sufferings. In one respect God hid his face from him, and forsook him, yet even under this calamity God was in another respect with him, for in the prospect of what was to happen in the last and trying scene of his sufferings, he said, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me," John xvi. 32. He then drank of the cup of unmingled sorrow, for there were no comfortable ingredients in his cup, but yet his Father fulfilled the promises, that he would keep, strengthen, and preserve him, Isaiah xlii. 6.; xlix. 8. and l. 7. Though there were times when he was destitute of all that was positively exhilarating, there never was a time during which his humanity was not supported to endure what was inflicted, or else the distress of his soul mitigated, that he might be able to bear it, Luke xxii. 43. The distinction between positive joy, and either being so strengthened as to be kept from utterly sinking, or our calamity itself being prevented from reaching such a height as would totally overwhelm us, serves to explain and to



harmonize those parts of Scripture which speak on the one hand of Christ's being forsaken of God, and on the other, of his being preserved and supported by him. It serves also to show, that there are kinds of influences from God, which in certain circumstances moderate affliction, without communicating positive gladness. It is easy, however, to see that this gives no countenance to the opposition between faith and feeling, to which I have adverted, while it accounts for the state of numbers under certain kinds of affliction.

It ought always to be remembered, my dear friend, that it is only in certain respects that the sufferings of Christ can illustrate the nature of those of his people ; and therefore on this subject much caution is requisite. What I now refer to, you will perceive, results from the very nature of things, and interferes not with the peculiarities of our Lord's circumstances, when he stooped to become " a curse for us."

It ought never to be forgotten, however, that in general the want of Christian enjoyment proceeds from a sinful cause. Sin is deceitful in its origin and progress, and is often operating to our injury, while we hold ourselves guiltless. Let not indolence or self-indulgence be fostered, because we are diseased, but let every effort be employed against them.

Allow me now to say a few words in regard to the discouragement which arises from the failure of our many efforts against sin. Sin gains no advantage over us so long as we keep depending on the Saviour, but the moment we commence a warfare distinct from him, it prevails, and all our efforts against it are baffled. Feeling this, we bemoan our case, and get discouraged. But the fact is, that instead of acting under the influence of love, from a sense of great forgiveness, we are at bottom engaged in labouring to make our peace with God. Now, this is not the spirit of a child, and never can we cleanse ourselves from our filthiness, but by the influence of the grace and promises of Heaven. We are very apt to imagine, that we are fighting against



sin, on the principles of the Gospel, when in reality we are struggling to establish some kind of claim on God for its blessings.

Instead of depending on the Saviour, we wish to add to the strength of the foundation of hope, by some additional security. We dread lest we be deceived in trusting solely to the declaration of God in his word. In addition to these, we may secretly wish for a voice from heaven, or some direct revelation to assure us of our safety ; or, which comes to the same thing, we are busy in endeavouring to work ourselves up to a particular state of feeling, or to work out some good thing in ourselves, before going to the cross for deliverance. Like Peter, who, though he had the word of his Master to rely on, instead of looking to his Lord, and simply crediting his word, fixed his eyes exclusively on the waves, and forgot the encouraging call that had been given him, we fix our attention exclusively on our guilt and our danger, and so lose sight of the all-sufficiency of that remedy revealed in the Gospel, and busy ourselves in seeking relief from some other quarter. The dread which seized the apostle, arose from his forgetting that his Master's call to him to venture on the water, implied that it would be safe for him to do so since the waves obeyed the word of the Saviour. In like manner, if, while we do not in words deny the truth of the Gospel, we are afraid to trust it without something of a more direct and tangible nature added to it, our fear will tend to sink, rather than to save us.

In such a case, when feeling the works of unbelieving fear, and our consequent insecurity, let us, as Peter did, cry to the Lord. Let us do so, not only for pardon, but also for deliverance from an evil heart of unbelief. When we read that the blood of the Son of God cleanseth from all sin, let us believe it, and be encouraged to keep his way, and this will at once calm and purify the heart. We shall thus be freed from all self-righteous labour, and from all the disappointments arising from this misgiving foundation. Do we read of the



number, power, malice, and wiles of our enemies,—we also read of the love and of the grace of God, and believing the promises of defence, guidance, and support, we shall meet our foes, and, relying on the Lord, we shall overcome them.

The promises are sometimes so clearly seen, that they cannot but be believed ; and we are ready to think, that our faith shall be always equally strong, forgetting the necessity of constant watchfulness, and we are thus laid open to temptation. One cause of this error, my dear friend, is, that we are apt to make a distinction between what we were when we first believed, and what we are, now that we are Christians, in regard to the ground of peace under a consciousness of guilt, and to the way of access to God. Now these are the same to a Christian, as to the man who has hitherto been a stranger to piety. This was taught of old, by the commandment which required that every new approach unto God should be made with blood. The perfection of Christ's sacrifice has rendered it unnecessary to offer another, but we ought not to draw near to God, or expect pardon but by again pleading the worth, and relying on the virtue of his accepted offering. No doubt a Christian has advantages which another has not. The fellowship he has with God, the experience he has had of the power of his grace, and the progress he has made in the life of religion, must all be felt an encouragement to go to the throne of his Father, and may be the means of enlivening his devotion, and of establishing and strengthening his faith. But these are abused if they are made the ground of his access to God, or the foundation of his acceptance with him. Never ought the blessings of his family to be put in the place of the work of his Son, on account of which alone he communicates of his goodness. To do so is not to hold fast the beginning of our confidence which was nothing but the atonement. No sooner do we thus err, than the sanctifying power of the truth ceases to be felt, for its true glory is thereby eclipsed. We feel the difference, and are perhaps struck



with it, but the cause is in ourselves, and our own backslidings in this way reprove us.

When I speak of the ground of forgiveness, and the medium of access to God, as the same in every case, I am far from meaning that the advancing Christian has no comfort but what arises from that peace which is preached to all, and which springs from nothing but the blood of Christ. Besides the blessing of peace of conscience, under a sense of guilt, the Christian, while he walks with God, enjoys comfort in his obedience, and tastes an earnest of the blessedness of heaven itself. These enjoyments doubtless arise from resting on the proper foundation of confidence; but this is very different from their being the ground of that confidence. When the apostle says, that we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren, his meaning cannot be that our love to the brethren is the cause of our having passed from death to life; it is only the fruit and evidence of a change of mind. In like manner, when he says, if our heart condemn us not as insincere in our profession of faith, then have we confidence towards God, 1 John iii. 14—21, he is not speaking of the foundation of our access to God, nor representing our consciousness of integrity in our profession of faith as the ground of our confidence before Him, but is affirming, that in this state of mind we approach God with a good conscience, as opposed to the distrust which must fill the mind of the man whose own heart condemns him for hypocrisy in his profession and worship. If we are really living by faith in the atonement, and so have our conscience purged by it, we can draw near to God with confidence. Of this state of mind, obedience is a fruit and token; and hence it is said, that we shall obtain what we ask, because we keep his commandments; that is, since in this state of mind, our desires are in union with the will of God, they shall therefore be gratified, John xv. 7.

It is not necessary, surely, that a Christian should be conscious of hypocrisy in his profession of the faith, in



order to his being humble before God, and to his really placing his confidence in the atonement. Peter, in the integrity of his heart, said, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Was this the language of pride? Was it not the language of a humbled and a penitent character; of one who had been restored, and who was now called to strengthen his brethren. When a Christian has the deepest views of his guilt and unworthiness, and is most deeply humbled before God, he may be able to say, in the integrity of his heart, that all his hope as a sinner is on the atonement, that he loves the Gospel of peace, and that having much forgiven he loves much. What is he conscious of but that he loves that truth which condemns him before God, strips him of all his fancied righteousness, and shuts him up to the cross as his only refuge, by convincing him that between him and the pit of perdition there is nothing but the finished work of the Redeemer? These are not the feelings of a man who is engaged in reflecting on the warmth and the constancy of his love, and is pleasing himself with the thought that he has done well, and that therefore he is safe. Far from the Christian's mind are ideas such as these, and yet he cannot condemn himself as destitute of love. Such may be the abundant sense of the love of God, as revealed in the atonement, that his soul may be filled with the most ardent affection, and that he may come before God without the least of that fear which hath torment, while he worships at the throne of grace with humble and reverential awe.

If, on the other hand, a man's conscience condemns him, by testifying that he does not believe in the sufficiency of the blood of Christ to purge from all sin, it is impossible that he can enjoy peace with God, or have any comfort in approaching him. If our heart testifies that we are insincere in our confession of sin, and that we are resolved not to forsake it, we cannot in such circumstances enjoy a sense of forgiveness, for wherever there is a scriptural sense of pardon, there is genuine



contrition, which is followed by forsaking the ways of iniquity. The testimony of a Christian's conscience, that he loves the truth and the character of God, is connected with a deep and a humbling sense of his sinfulness and imperfections, which leads him to the atonement as the sole ground of his hope, and to the throne of grace for mercy to pardon and grace to help him in time of need.

Forget not, my dear friend, that a deep sense of unworthiness, and of the weakness of our love to the Saviour, when compared with the glory of his character, and the greatness of his love to us, is much fitted to cause us to question if we indeed love him at all, while yet he really has our hearts. Remember also that genuine affection appears not only in burning ardour and rapturous delight, but in a settled complacency, in a readiness to suffer and to act for our Lord, and in humble and abasing views of ourselves, when we dwell on his character. The immense interest which we have at stake is also fitted to stagger our confidence. The man who has no interest in a vessel that is at sea, can easily be persuaded of its safety, but he whose all is on board, feels many anxieties. Is it matter of wonder, then, that creatures such as we are should at times feel perplexed when the unutterable importance of eternity is vividly before us? What is it, however, that can settle the mind, but growth in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ?

It becomes us, then, to hear the voice which says, "Abide in me, and I will abide in you." We ought to live by faith, for holiness as well as pardon. "I live," says Paul, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And when he spake of his labours he said, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." This language is not meant by him to discourage the use of means to mortify sin; far from it, but to warn against confidence in the means considered in themselves, and to lead to a life of prayer to the Lord, and of simple and constant trust in him. Ever are we dependent on him;



and it is a blessed thing to be in the constant habit of uniting complete reliance on him with unabating activity. In this case, we labour not from any high opinion of our powers, but because we trust in God, who has graciously promised us his Spirit in answer to our prayers.

We are naturally unwilling to be kept in constant dependence on the communication of aid from above. Too often do we ask assistance, not only for the present necessity, but that we may have a kind of stock in ourselves, that we may not need to be daily coming unto God, as poor and helpless sinners. Our spirit is like to that of the Israelites, who were averse to the humbling manner in which they were fed with the manna, when every day they were obliged to go and gather of it for their support, instead of being allowed to lay it up in store. They would not live by faith, but would have a visible God, and visible means of support and security; and is not a life of faith contrary to our natural bias? How unwilling are we to look afresh every day for our spiritual provision, and to trust in God without some visible means of supply? At one time they refused to go against the Canaanites, though God had promised to be with them; and at another, they would go against them though they had no promise of his presence. In the former instance, they would not use the means of conquest in the faith of the promise, and in the latter they would use them without expecting their success from the divine blessing, but from their employment of them. Now, true piety unites faith in God with the use of means. The assurance of success always leads to activity, while the dread of a defeat enervates the heart. Of course, the promises of aid and of victory, instead of relaxing diligence, stimulate to it. If we have in any case failed, they will lead us to blame ourselves, and, at the same time to say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall I shall arise." It was God's revealing to David that he would build him an house, which made him find in his heart to pray so



earnestly for the establishment of it. And in like manner, when we look to the promise of the everlasting covenant, in which the Lord says, he will write his laws on our hearts, we become the more earnest in watching and praying, and labouring in the use of appointed means, that the work may be accomplished.

To neglect duty because we do not feel a particular degree of warmth in our affections, proceeds either from the notion that our disposition for duty is the result of something which we must effect in ourselves, or from an idea that the aid of the Holy Spirit is given in an immediate manner. Satan is thus transformed into an angel of light. While there is an appearance of humility in depressing, with a sense of emptiness, the mind is turned from the fulness that is in Christ, and to which we have constant access. The Christian, it is true, is taught to feel his insufficiency for any duty, but never to induce him to neglect what he is called to, but rather to make him the more careful to go to his Lord for all that he needs. A great part of spiritual wisdom consists in maintaining at once a deep conviction of our own weakness, and a firm persuasion that we can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us, in uniting simplicity of dependence on divine grace with constant activity in the work of God. We ought, in humility, to act rather than dispute; and thus to unite in our practice the two doctrines, relative to the duty of man, and the free grace of Jehovah. If the Lord had barely revealed his goodness in pardoning sin, and had merely said that he would sanctify us, without telling us how, or prescribing to us any regimen, or directing us to any medicine to cure our spiritual maladies, this had been saying to us, "Stand still and see the salvation of our God." With regard, indeed, to the work of atonement and the victory of the Saviour, and also our final deliverance from the consequences of sin, this language is strictly appropriate. But with regard to our sanctification, commands and exhortations have been given along with manifestations of the grace of God, and promises



of his aid ; and we are called to quit ourselves like men, and to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. It is on this principle that the apostle calls on Christians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. ii. 12, 13. He is addressing believers, and not unbelievers of the Gospel ; and is calling on them not to work out their justification, for they were already justified by faith without works of law, but to endeavour to be progressively delivered from the dominion of sinful principles, the influence of temptation, and the practice of iniquity, by the sanctifying energy of the unutterable and free love of God, which had already been manifested towards them in their redemption through the death of his Son.

The rest which the Lord had promised his people, is not that which arises from the persuasion that no enemy shall ever attack us,—it is that which arises from confidence in the power, faithfulness, and love of the Captain of Salvation, by whom we have been called to the conflict, and who hath said that we shall be more than conquerors. We are prone to seek such a certification of our safety as would supersede, not merely the fear which hath torment, but that godly and cautious fear by which we are preserved. We wish to be assured of our safety in a way which would render it unnecessary to be daily and constantly coming to the Saviour, and maintaining that watchfulness and holy circumspection which the Gospel requires. Now such a kind of safety is quite different from that which is the privilege of Christians, and it is the unbelief and carnality of the heart which desires it. Confidence in God is to be united with the diligent and the constant exercise of every Christian principle, in the conscientious discharge of every commanded duty. It is the union of these things, then—reliance on God, and activity in the use of means,—that distinguishes a Christian.

Make the word of God, then, your counsellor, and look to ~~him~~ for guidance and assistance, and expect not too much from creatures. It has been well observed that



truth is the daughter of calmness, of unbroken meditations, and of thoughts often revised and corrected. I am, &c.

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## LETTER XXVIII.

### ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

The Lord's Supper a commemorative ordinance—A profession of faith in the atonement—A communion feast—A profession of confidence in the Divine promises—A profession of faith in the second coming of Christ—General remarks—Conclusion.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I SHALL now, agreeably to your request, write you a few thoughts on the Lord's Supper. The nature, design, and subject of this ordinance, may easily be learned from the words of its institution, and from the direct references to it in the apostolic writings. We are there taught, that it is a commemorative appointment. "Do this in remembrance of me," is the language of our Lord,—language which refers to the natural depravity, weakness, and instability of our hearts, through which we are prone to forget him, and which teaches us that this institution is appointed for the purpose of counteracting these evils, and keeping him in our constant, grateful, and affectionate remembrance. Here our faith and love are assisted by our senses, for in various respects it is an emblematical ordinance, in subserviency to its commemorative design.

The bread is an emblem of the body of Christ, and the wine is a sign of his blood. The breaking of the bread is a significant action, being emblematical of the body of our Lord as crucified, and so a representation of his sufferings when his body was bruised and broken for us. "This is my body broken for you," was the pathetic declaration of our Saviour, in which he exhibited himself as the substitute for sinners, his death as



a sacrifice for sin, and the benevolent design of his undertaking, which was to redeem his people from guilt and from ruin. The wine, as a figure of the blood of Christ, is a sign of that in the sacrifice which made the atonement. This, the Israelites were taught, was the blood of the victim; for, said God, "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul," Lev. xvii. 11. The blood of the Redeemer was his life, which he gave up in sacrifice as a ransom for the souls of men. Hence he is said to have poured out his soul unto death, and to have made his soul an offering for sin. In allusion to this, he says, that the wine in the cup represents his blood as shed, or poured out—of which the pouring out of the blood of the ancient sacrifices was a figure. This typical rite in the services of the Levitical sanctuary was no doubt in his eye, and he here represents himself as the great antitype of the figures of the law. He appears also to have had in view the drink-offerings which accompanied the Mosaic sacrifices, and which were poured out unto God, Num. xxviii. 7. as when he speaks of his body as broken, he seems to refer to certain of the meat-offerings, Lev. ii. 5, 6, 14. which were offered on expiatory occasions. The latter, when connected with blood-offerings, were typical of his oblation, and in an extreme case, even when offered without them, Lev. v. 11, 13.

The distinction which he makes between his body and his blood is not to lead us to separate the two, but to present to us the same grand subject of the atonement in different lights,—the breaking of his body being designed to signify his whole sufferings in our nature, and the pouring out of his blood being meant to denote their tremendous issue in his death, their propitiatory nature, and their blissful result; even the "remission of the sins of many." For him a body was prepared, Heb. x. 5. or, in other words, he became a partaker of our whole nature, including flesh and blood,



strictly so called, and a rational soul. By his obedience to the will of God, "which called him to give himself in sacrifice for sin, we are said to be separated to God, namely, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all," Heb. x. 10. Here, of course, more is meant than his body literally, even the whole offering of himself, Heb. ix. 14, 16. Accordingly the propitiatory nature of his sufferings, and their happy effect in taking away sin, are elsewhere distinctly set before us in reference to his blood as shed for the remission of sins, and for the same purpose presented in the heavenly sanctuary, Heb. ix. 14, 15, 22, 23. and x. 19.

Such, then, is the emblematical nature of this institution, which, as I have said, is in subserviency to its commemorative design. Our faith and our affection are aided by our senses as we contemplate these external symbols,—our weakness is kindly met and provided against. This is one of the many instances of the divine condescension with which we are graciously favoured, and is a striking proof of the care and affection of our High Priest.

In celebrating this ordinance, we ought, then, to keep up a constant remembrance of the Saviour. We ought to remember the dignity of his person as God in our nature, what he hath done for us in coming from heaven to earth, in veiling his glory, becoming, though rich, poor for our sakes, and cheerfully stooping to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We ought to dwell particularly on the rich, the generous, and the amazing love which moved him for us to become obedient unto death, and to encounter and sustain all the horrors of the curse. We ought to remember the blissful issues and consequences of his propitiatory sacrifice ; his present and constant ministration for us in the heavenly temple ; the perpetuity of his attachment, and the sweet tenderness of his regards ; now that he is alive in the world of light, and there invested with universal government. With deep interest we ought to keep in



memory the many and invaluable blessings which he hath freely procured for us. The language of our hearts ought ever to be,

“ O thou, my soul, forget no more  
The Friend who all thy misery bore.”

This institution is appointed to keep up the remembrance in particular of the death of Christ. It is so, because of the unutterable importance of this event. It was the death of the Prince of Life, the Son of God, the Lord of Glory. It was most voluntary on the part of the wondrous sufferer, while it was at the same time the effect of the most excruciating anguish. Never was there an act of worship like to it. Here love and devotedness to God were displayed in their highest glory ; here his claims were manifested and answered to the full, and here there was the brightest exhibition of the perfections of his character. The most important consequences have followed in securing the honours of the divine law ; vindicating the rights of the divine government, and “ opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers.” Here a perfect expiation is found, and here was finished that wondrous work which is ever pleaded by the Saviour, and is most prevalently intercessory. This is the centre of the ineffable delight of God ; it is the source of peace, and hope, and joy ; it leads back to God with the sweetest and most attractive power ; it forms our character upon his ; and it will be the subject of universal love, admiration, and song, in the heavenly and eternal world. Into this the “ angels desire to look.” Long had they contemplated the progress of events leading to it, and when it took place it was like a flood of light bursting forth upon them, and heaven was filled with joy.

If the mere spectators of this feel thus, how ought we to feel who are indebted to it for redemption from all evil and the enjoyment of all good ? Where shall the affections be engaged if not at the cross of Christ ?



What can fire the soul if this is contemplated with coldness? Ought not our hearts to be animated and engaged according to the worth and glory of the object, and the importance of the subject which attracts them, and the degree of our interest in it? And if so, must they not here be elevated indeed? Surely, then, the importance of the Saviour's death is a proper reason why it has been appointed to be thus devoutly remembered.

But the commandment to commemorate the death of the Redeemer springs also from love to us. It is not issued as a mere test of obedience, or merely as a display of authority—it is the counsel of a friend—of a brother—of Him who loved us, and is desirous of our hearts in return, because this spirit is essential to our happiness. It was followed by the declaration, that he would not drink the fruit of the vine till he drank it new with them in his Father's kingdom. He meant this as a promise, that he would not forget his friends when in his kingdom, but would impart to them of its new joys. He entered into joy when he rose and was glorified; and he made them to taste of it when he gave them the consolations of his Spirit, who took of his things and showed them unto them, and particularly as they did eat and drink at his table. He appointed his supper as a memorial of his love, and as an outward token that he would not drink the new wine of the kingdom alone, but would cause them to drink of it along with himself. He thus promises that they shall sup with him, and he with them. It is an ordinance, then, designed for our comfort, and purity, and joy. He well knows, that when the soul is conscious of guilt, and filled with the dread of judgment, if we remember his sufferings and atonement, we shall obtain rest. When we feel that our hearts are cold and insensible, he is aware, that if we look to him whom our sins have pierced, we shall be melted into tenderness.—The hard heart will be softened, and we shall cleave to him with mingled sorrow and joy—sorrow, when we reflect on



what our sins cost him—and joy, when we think of his love, of his salvation, and of the blessedness of his fellowship. He knows, that in the paths of obedience we shall find, in remembering him, the most powerful motives and encouragements to fidelity in duty. He is aware, that amidst all our sufferings and trials, our perplexities and sorrows, our weaknesses and distresses, if we but remember him aright, we shall be encouraged and strengthened—filled with hope, and with gladness, and enabled to triumph in the view even of death and eternity. His honour and our profit are thus kindly and naturally united. Surely, then, every consideration of duty and of interest should induce us to listen to his last wish, and to obey his last injunction.

But in the observance of this rite we also profess our faith in the work of Christ, as the sole ground of our acceptance with God. “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, *do ye show* the Lord’s death.” In obedience to this, we, in celebrating this appointment, publicly confess Christ crucified as our only Saviour—we exhibit his death, as the only foundation of our hope towards God, and we openly glory in our connection with him who suffered, and died, amidst ignominy and contempt, and who is in his true character still despised of the world. We therefore not only declare that the work of Christ is all our salvation, and all our desire, but we also proclaim to every one around us, that the redemption of the cross is as free to them as to us, and we virtually call upon them, not indeed to unite with us in the observance of this rite, while yet in their sins, but certainly to embrace the truth and the salvation of Jesus. Thus the institution not only edifies believers, it may also be blessed to all who witness its observance. It is of course a public and not a private service. In Scripture it is invariably represented as an open profession of faith and discipleship, and as always observed with an assembly of Christians. The injunction to show, or exhibit the death of Christ, is a proof that the observance of the institution was viewed



as a very striking manner of proclaiming the Gospel to spectators ; and from being such none were excluded. It formed, accordingly, a part of the stated services of the churches for a long period, as is evident from Scripture, and from historic testimony of undoubted credit, Acts ii. 42. ; xx. 7. 1 Cor. xi. 26 ; xvi. 2. This exhibits an interesting harmony between the death and the resurrection of Jesus. The latter is commemorated by hallowing that day on which he arose ; and as we cannot think of that delightful event without thinking of his death, it is edifying to observe, at the same time, that institution, the object of which is to assist in this very exercise. It accords also with the principle of love to the Saviour, for as we profess to be the friends of Christ, will not love lead us to ask, how often we may enjoy this delightful privilege ? and the more frequently we can, the more love will rejoice.

But while none were excluded from witnessing it, it is self-evident, that none could thus confess their faith in the one sacrifice of Christ as the only ground of acceptance with God, who did not believe the Gospel. The confession made in the observance of this institution, necessarily implies, that we perceive the complete sufficiency of the atonement of Jesus to take away sin, and to reconcile us to God. It implies, that we see here an answer to every perplexing question, as to the way of acceptance, and the source of peace to a guilty conscience—because here God appears at once, just and merciful in perfection—just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Without this the confession in question cannot be made in sincerity and truth. It is the belief of the Gospel alone that implants that love to Christ, and excites that supreme desire to be found in him, by which Christians are distinguished, and under the influence of which they gratefully, and affectionately commemorate his death. An indiscriminate admission to ~~the~~ ordinance were therefore in utter opposition to its nature and design, dishonourable to the Saviour, and of the most ruinous tendency to the partakers themselves. On the



other hand, how delightful and edifying it is to confess with the understanding and the heart the important and precious truth in which is displayed the glory of the divine character, and the harmony of the divine perfections.

Christians are called to separate themselves from the the irreligious of every class, and to unite in religious society to partake of this and other institutions. The church of Christ is as distinct from the world as ever ; and it ought visibly to appear so. Not that the design of that union, which ought to exist among Christians is merely that they may obtain access to the table of the Lord, but that, connected therewith, they may edify one another by walking in love, as Christ also loved them, and that by exhibiting the sanctifying, the benevolent, and the gladdening influence of the Gospel, they may recommend it to the world. When a church of Christ thus adorns the doctrine of God their Saviour, they ought also to recommend it to such as may come into their assembly, "by showing forth our Lord's death till he come." This is quite a different thing from indiscriminate fellowship with them.

I am here led to remark, that this ordinance is also a communion feast. It is called a feast, in allusion to the Passover, in 1 Cor. v. 8 ; and in chapter x. 15—21, it is illustrated by the feasts which were connected with sacrifices, both among the Jews and the Gentiles. It is a representation of a feast upon a sacrifice, and of our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and with one another, in that blessedness which springs from the divine glory as manifested in the one offering of the Redeemer.

In the passages I have just referred to, the apostle sets the body and blood of Christ in opposition to the sacrifices of the Gentiles, and makes a reference to those sacrifices of the Israelites of which the priests and the people were in certain circumstances allowed to eat. In eating of the peace-offerings, there was a representation of that peace and consequent mutual fellowship which



subsisted among all who jointly partook of them. Part of the sacrifice was consumed upon the altar, and was considered as received by the God of the altar, and of course was his part—part was eaten by the priest, and part by the people, Lev. vii. 6, 15. Thus God, the priest, and the people, partook of the same sacrifice. They all sat, as it were, at one table, participated in the same enjoyment, and so had fellowship. The Lord's Supper, then, represents joint fellowship in partaking of the sacrifice of Christ. The bread and wine are not by any means offered in sacrifice—they are but outward signs of that by which a sacrifice has been made by the Saviour. Of course, our eating and drinking of them is not that in which we have fellowship with God and with his Son, for of these they do not partake with us ; but our eating bread and drinking wine is a sign, or visible representation of our spiritually partaking with them in the enjoyment which springs from the glories of the cross as an adequate exhibition of the divine character. Since the happiness of God arises from his own character, and since the work of the Redeemer gives the fullest and brightest display of it, here of course his soul dwells—here the fulness of his delight rests, and from his glorious character, as here manifested, his blessedness springs, Isa. xlii. 1, 21, Matth. xvii. 5. Eph. v. 2. Now we have fellowship with the Father when we perceive and relish this display of his glory ; when our hearts are captivated with his excellencies ; when from this we derive our peace, and hope, and joy ; when we imbibe his spirit, enter into his views, and become one with him in principle, affection, aim, and pursuit. Then that which delights his soul, not only calms and delights our guilty and troubled heart, but fills it with holy and exalted gladness. That which he contemplates and enjoys we study and delight in. We in particular judge of the Saviour as he does ; we bless him for delivering our surety from death, and for crowning him with glory and honour. In a word, we participate of his feelings, and we drink at the fountain-



head of all true bliss, and the happiness of Jehovah becomes our happiness through that transformation into his likeness which is effected by beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.

This institution also represents our fellowship with the Saviour, who, as Emmanuel and as our High Priest, is now blessed in contemplating and enjoying the divine glory and character as displayed in his work. In allusion to the privilege granted the Israelites of eating of the peace-offerings, it is said, that "the meek shall eat" of his sacrifice and be satisfied, Psalm xxii. 26. This is that altar of which, as Christians, we partake, Heb. xiii. 10, and this is the meaning of the law which allowed the ancient priests to partake along with them. The Redeemer, in his priestly character, is blessed in beholding the divine character as manifested and glorified in his wondrous sacrifice. When speaking of himself as the bread of life, and, as such, the antitype of the ancient manna, he refers to his sacrifice, declaring that he would give his flesh for the life of the world, and that whosoever did eat of his flesh, and drink of his blood, had eternal life begun, and should have it in full perfection at the last day, John vi. 51—56. He who believes in the divine testimony concerning his sacrifice, is said to eat of it, because he continues to contemplate it, to trust his salvation upon it, to derive from it his peace, hope, and happiness, to imbibe the spirit it displays, and to imitate the character it exhibits. Our Lord is not there speaking of the ordinance of his supper, for many who have no access to it, and never observed it, are blessed with his salvation: but still he is speaking of the great thing represented in this institution. To be a thing, however, and to be but a sign or representation of it, are very different, and ought not to be confounded. To apply the striking metaphors by which the Saviour taught the necessity of faith in his atonement, to the rite which is only symbolical of the spiritual exercise, is to substitute the letter for the spirit. To such as are living by faith in the sacrifice of



Christ, the outward sign will be of use, and such ought to improve the privilege when in their power, and when not in their power, the Saviour, can supply the lack. But those who are strangers to this faith, and of course to the life connected with it, can derive no benefit from their eating of the Lord's Supper, but, on the contrary, must be injured by it.

The life of which the Saviour speaks is not merely existence, but blessedness; so that when he speaks of "the living Father," he refers not merely to his being, but also to his happiness; and when he says that he "lives by the Father," he refers to his life and blessedness as Mediator, the full glory of which is possessed by him as the Great High Priest of the house of God, in the enjoyment of the manifestation of his Father's glory in his own person, and character, his work and his kingdom. When, therefore, he says, that whosoever eateth of his sacrifice "shall live by him as he lives by the Father," he refers to that fellowship with him in blessedness, which arises from contemplating the divine character as displayed in his work. Of this, then, our eating and drinking of the symbols of his sacrifice is an expressive representation. It is an outward sign that we drink with him of that new wine, or that exalted joy of which he partakes in his Father's kingdom; that kingdom which is founded on his finished work, which he received on his entrance into glory.

But there is here also a representation of our fellowship with each other. It is not intended for an individual as such, but is a social ordinance, as is evident from 1 Cor. x. 16, where it is said, "The cup of blessing, for which we bless, or give thanks, is it not the communion (or joint participation) of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion (or the joint participation) of the body of Christ?" The proper reading of the 17th verse is, "Because the bread is one, we the many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." Now, it is evidently the design of the apostle to shew, that the in-



stitution is a social one, and that it is a visible representation of the close fellowship of those who partake of it. It could not on any other principle be called a "communion." It is, of course, intended to exhibit the unity of the church which observes it as one body, united in the faith of the same Gospel, in the hope of deliverance from the evils common to them all, in the expectation of glory, founded on the common foundation of the cross, in the enjoyment of the same blessings and privileges, and in the same fellowship with their exalted Lord, as their common Head, Deliverer, and Ruler, Eph. iv. 4—6. 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13. They meet as brethren, and unite in celebrating, by one service, that wondrous event in which they are all equally interested; and thus is the spirit of love, and tenderness, and liberality, cherished and strengthened. Every particular church is thus a visible representation of the fellowship of the general assembly and church of the first-born, with their Father, their Elder Brother the Saviour, and with each other. Hence the Corinthians were blamed for separating into parties, and eating the Lord's Supper apart from each other, and were required to tarry one for another when it was to be observed, 1 Cor. xi. 21—33. It was only when the disciples "came together" in the assembly that this ordinance was to be administered. I need not say, then that since an individual, as such, cannot represent the joint fellowship of a body, it follows undeniably, that the social observance of the rite is essential to it, as otherwise it is converted into a thing quite different, and its true nature is lost sight of.

The apostle, in 1 Cor. x. 16. shows that the very external form of the ordinance manifests, that it is the joint act, not of an assembly indiscriminately collected, but of a select society. He proves this from their joint participation in the breaking and eating of the same bread, and in drinking of the same cup; and from their jointly blessing, or praising God, by thanksgiving, for the many blessings which, as Christians, they had ac-



tually received through the atonement, and for that love of which it is the fruit and token, Acts ii. 47. and v. 13, 14. We are called then to consider, not only ourselves, but our fellow-worshippers, as the first Christians most evidently did. The primitive churches were societies of (Ephes. i. 1. Article 19th of the church of England) "faithful men;" that is, of such as appeared to be believers in Christ; and when any of their number acted unsuitably to their profession, prompt and appropriate means were used to bring him to repentance; and, if the means failed, separation from their fellowship followed, Matt. xviii. 15—17. 1 Tim. v. 20. 1 Cor. v. 7—11, 13. 1 Tim. iii. 1—5. Luke xvii. 3, 4. Gal. vi. 1. 2 Cor. ii. 6—8. Their fellowship was just the constant exercise of the principle of love. And surely the most genuine exercise of this principle is to guard others, as far as we can, against being deceived in the important concerns of eternity; and great must be the violation of it, when by our conduct towards them, we contribute to their deception, Lev. xix. 17. Gen. iv. 9. To whom but to the friends of Christ can these moving words be addressed, "This do in remembrance of me." Can any one either expect or desire to be remembered by such as continue his enemies? And can the enemies of Christ be expected gratefully to remember him, or cheerfully to obey him? For whom then is this ordinance intended, but for those who, conscious of guilt and unworthiness, have fled for refuge to his cross, and who, as abased and self-condemned sinners, are earnestly desirous of expressing their gratitude to him, who loved them and gave himself for them. It is intended for such as can say, "We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy great and manifold mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under the table." And whose hearts say, Lord Jesus I would remember thee; and though my gratitude and love are low and languid, yet my soul desires to be quickened and ex-



cited by the recollection of thy constant and unspeakable love.

But in this ordinance there is not only a joint act of fellowship, but a representation of a mutual act of communion in giving and receiving. God is exhibited as giving us his Son, and the Redeemer as giving himself for us ; while we ought with the most grateful and delightful emotions, to receive with humility and joy the unutterably precious blessings of salvation. As meat and drink are the necessary ingredients in the sustenance of man, so the symbols of his broken body and shed blood are signs of that full provision which is made for our redemption and happiness ; “ for his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed.” As bread and wine nourish our bodies, so do the communications of the divine goodness, through the atonement of Christ, nourish our souls. The atonement, and all connected with it, become the objects of our thoughts, and our affections, and the mind takes the character of its food. Thus is there exhibited a visible representation of the family of God, receiving all blessings from their Father through the mediation of their Elder Brother, and in fellowship with one another, expressing their gratitude and joy.

In the observance of this institution, we profess our confidence in the promises of the everlasting covenant, and our hope of all the blessings they exhibit. “ This is my blood,” said the Saviour, “ of the new covenant.” By the covenant of God, is meant his promise of salvation and all necessary blessings, confirmed by sacrifice. Thus were the promises to Abraham confirmed, Gen. xv. 9, 10, 18. ; and hence were they called a covenant. Thus were the promises of the old covenant, Exod. xxiv. 5—8. and also those of the new and everlasting covenant confirmed, Heb. ix. 15—20. ; xiii. 20. In Gal. iii. 15—18. the apostle reasons on the principle that a promise, or promises, and a covenant, are one and the same thing, it being understood that a sacrifice has been slain for the purpose of confirmation. Indeed,



the word in the Old Testament used to signify a covenant, signifies a purifier, or purifying sacrifice ; and the phrase, for making a covenant, signifies to cut a purifier, or to cut off a purifying victim. The reason of this is, that when God made the promise of salvation and eternal life to the guilty and the unworthy children of men, he confirmed it by sacrifice, in order to show how it was to be accomplished through an atonement, and that the atonement typified should ensure its fulfilment. I need not enlarge on the necessity of confirming promises made to sinners by such means as shall effect reconciliation and purification. It was in consequence of this that promises were ratified by slaying a victim, cutting it asunder, and passing between the parts of it. It is not then a promise simply that is a covenant, but a promise to sinners confirmed by a sacrifice which is illustrative of the way in which the bestowing of the blessing promised becomes consistent with the divine character and law, Gen. xv. 7, 8, 17, 18. To this there is a reference in Ps. l. 5. where it is said, "Gather my saints together unto me ; those that have made (or cut off, or solemnized) my covenant by sacrifice."

Men soon came to confirm their promises by a sacrifice ; and as their engagements were generally mutual, the word came to be used to denote a mutual compact. But, when the term refers to the covenant of God, it denotes nothing of this kind, but his own free and gracious promises to the guilty and the unworthy, ratified by a sacrifice : or else an institution, or system of institutions, founded upon, and illustrative of, his promises. Thus the Sabbath was in this last sense called his covenant, because it was a sign of the rest promised to his people ; and the whole system of the Mosaic institutions is called His covenant, because they were founded on his promises, and were signs of the blessings promised, Exod. xxxi. 16. Lev. xxvi. 15. His language accordingly is, not that of a proposal to enter into a mutual agreement with any individual whatever, but it is,



“with thee will I establish my covenant;” and corresponding language is employed when a body is in question. A covenant among men, you know, is a mutual stipulation between two or more parties, for their mutual benefit. But as God can receive no addition to his blessedness from his creatures, it is evident that when he establishes a covenant with them it must be solely for their advantage. The covenant of peace, then, is just his promises of salvation and eternal life, as ratified by the death of Christ. When God is viewed as the king of Israel, and the people as his subjects in that character, the term covenant may be used with a greater latitude; but this, like the exception to a general rule, confirms, rather than invalidates what has been stated.

When his people offered the appointed sacrifices, they were simply celebrating the instituted representation of His covenant, in the faith of the fulfilment of its promises, with gratitude to him for his goodness, and an earnest desire of obtaining the blessings he had graciously promised them. In like manner, in the Lord's Supper, we drink of that cup, which is a representation of the blood of Christ, which hath confirmed all the promises of the new covenant; for in him they are all yea and amen, 2 Cor. i. 20. By his blood, every obstacle in the way of their accomplishment is removed. Great, numerous, and precious as are the blessings they contain, they shall all be bestowed through this sacrifice. It is thus that our hope in the promises is confirmed by the death of Christ, and this we express in commemorating it according to his will. Such is the value of his sacrifice, that God hath declared that he never will again remember sin, by requiring any more offering for it; and on this he rests the accomplishment of all the promises of the new and everlasting covenant, Jer. xxxi. 31—34. Heb. viii. 10—12; x. 17, 18.

It follows, therefore, that there is nothing required like entering into a covenant, in the common sense of the term. The covenant of God, it is evident from the



passages I have just referred to, consists of free promises, ratified by the work of the Redeemer. In this ordinance we are called to commemorate that glorious work with devout and thankful hearts, and in the sure and certain hope that not one good word of all that the Lord hath spoken shall fail to be fulfilled. Not the most distant hint of any thing like a vow or oath being of the nature of this observance, is given in the word of God. It is true that our religious services include the solemn dedication of ourselves, and of all that we have, to God, and in the observance of the Lord's Supper there is much that is fitted to cherish this spirit, but this is not the same thing as is meant by a vow in its common acceptation. In every act of worship, Christians express their resolution or purpose to be the devoted subjects of the Saviour, and not merely at the Lord's table. Here, no doubt, they ought, in a particular manner, to feel the power of those motives which urge believers to cleave with firm purpose of heart to the Lord; but different ways of expressing their fixed resolution in the strength of divine grace, to abide by him, are adapted to different persons, which, setting aside every other consideration, forbids us to insist on any one as particularly enjoined.

No doubt, too, the public confession of the truth which is there made, must aggravate our guilt, if we afterwards deny it, or cease to be influenced by it, so that it may be said to lay us under great obligations. But so, in a measure, does our observance of every other divine appointment, all of which are connected with the death of Christ. There is much evidence to prove, that the confining a sense of obligation so much to one institution, has the effect of inducing comparative, and often great indifference as to others. The Gospel of Christ, and, in particular, his death, furnishes the most powerful motives to obedience, and in vain do we think of adding to them. It is not by formal engagements at the table of the Lord, that we can increase the importance of any duty, nor ought such things ever to give



us peace under a sense of guilt, or cause confidence in our steadfastness. If they do, we shall find, to our cost, that they are a false foundation.

“One view of Christ, in his transcendently glorious character as the dear Redeemer of lost souls, hath more power and efficacy to break the bonds of sin, and urge to obedience, than all the vows, promises, and resolutions, wherewith we can bind our souls.” (*Haweis on the Lord's Supper*, chap. vi.) “Think not,” says a well known writer, “to bring yourself to good by vows and promises, as if the strength of your own law could do it when the strength of God's law doth it not. The devil will urge you to vow, and then to break, that he may perplex your conscience the more.” (*Marshall on Sanctification*, Direct. xiii. p. 244.)

Instead of ensnaring and entangling ourselves with oaths or formal vows, let us contemplate the cross and character of Christ. Here there is all that is moving in love, affecting in condescension, and engaging in mercy,—united with all that can impress us with a sense of the baseness and desert of sin; and in contemplating and celebrating the love of God in the gift of his Son, the unutterable condescension of the Saviour, we shall be powerfully constrained by the innumerable mercies of the everlasting covenant to present ourselves unto God as a living sacrifice, and to live to Him who for us groaned, and bled, and died. Never let us suppose that the remembering of the death of Christ can be of little use, or change the design of his Supper, and turn it into an oath of fidelity; as if the duties of obedience were more likely to be discharged from a sense of the obligation of vows, than from the remembrance of the unutterable glories of the cross. Such ideas will tend to darken our views of the covenant of peace; and they invest the institution with a kind of mystery which perplexes the conscientious, and not seldom excites unfounded confidence in the ignorant and presumptuous. Very different is the scriptural view of it from this complicated service. Indeed, even in the services of prayer



and praise, in the name of Christ, and the rehearsal of the Gospel, there is a remembrance of his work. The difference in the Lord's Supper lies in the advantage of outward signs, and a more striking display of fellowship. Connected with the air of mystery which has been thrown around it, is the fear which many have of frequently observing it. But is it not delightful frequently to express our love to the Redeemer, and to meet often with our best and our tried friend? We are indeed prone to be formal in this, as in other parts of worship, but it is not the way to cure this propensity to abstain from the service of devotion. Is the man who prays but a few times in the year more devout than he who prays daily? The more frequently, indeed, that unbelievers observe the Lord's Supper, the more indifferent they will be about it; and the more seldom they do so, the more superstitious terror will they feel regarding it: but it never was intended for such at all, and therefore we are not left to choose between the evil of constant formality and coldness, and that of a periodical self-righteous and superstitious seriousness, which is as far removed from genuine piety as the other.\*

\* Dr. Erskine, speaking on this subject, expresses himself to the following effect:

Does not the Bible speak strongly on the solemnity of prayer, and the danger of rashness in speaking unto God? And does it not tell us that the word, when heard in an unworthy manner, is a savour of death unto death? Shall we then pray and hear the word seldom, that we may do it with the greater solemnity? Would not this way of reasoning be fallacious, if applied to prayer and hearing the word? And is it not equally so when applied to the Lord's Supper? Christians will not quit their reverence at the Lord's Supper upon any the greatest frequency, as appears by their united frequency and reverence in other institutions. And the show of reverence which the ungodly bring to it is not worth the preserving.—*Dissertations*, p. 319.

The same sentiments are expressed by Mr. Brown of Haddington, in his *Apology* for the more frequent administration of the Lord's Supper; by Mr. Randal of Stirling, in his *Letter* on the same subject; and by Mr. Willison, in the *Preface* to his *Catechism* on this institution. See also *Thoughts on the Present Revival of Religion*, by President Edwards, p. 214.



Once more, my dear friend, we, in the observance of this institution, profess our faith in the second coming of Christ, and our hope of that event,—“Show ye the Lord’s death *till he come.*” These words show the permanence of this ordinance, and call upon the churches in all ages to celebrate it. But they also teach us to look to the first and the second coming of Christ, in connexion with each other. He appeared as a sin-offering when on earth—he is now absent in ~~the~~ heaven; but this institution is the pledge of his coming again. In looking to our own death, we think of His,—in anticipating his coming to judgment, we contemplate Calvary; and in thus connecting events so interesting to us, and so adapted to our circumstances, we are at once comforted and purified. This delivers from the fear of death, dissipates the gloom of the grave, and inspires us with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. We need this ordinance while here; but when we see him as he is, no such means will be necessary to keep the Lamb that was slain in our constant and delightful remembrance.

It must be evident from this view of the subject, that there is nothing like a charm in the influence and effect of the celebration of this ordinance. There is nothing mystical, in the common sense of the term, in it. We are, in other instances, taught the truth of God, by reading or hearing his word, and here we are taught it by external signs. It is, in each case, the truth that is brought to view; but, in the former instances, we are taught it by words, and in the latter instance, we are taught it by an appeal to the senses. The benefits arising from the observance of the institution, must then be in proportion to the degree in which we are brought to understand and feel the power of the great truth which it exhibits. As a symbolical representation it has many advantages,—it appeals to several of our senses at the same time—the truth is presented to the mind by several inlets—and, by the divine blessing, it makes a deep and



powerful impression, and excites a lively interest in its glory.

God has indeed promised to bless, in a particular manner, the institutions of his grace, but he does so by means of the truths which they teach. Now, as the Lord's Supper is a commemorative ordinance, it can only be of special service in so far as it is made the means of bringing and keeping before the mind the objects to be remembered, Gal. iii. 1. 1 Cor. xv. 2, 3, 4. 2 Pet. i. 12. Accordingly we find, that the commemorative appointments of the law were designed to profit the worshippers, by reminding them of the divine interpositions in their behalf, and of the mercies that were yet in store for them, Exod. xii. 26, 27. Deut. xvi. 3, 12. Heb. x. 1.

Too often do people expect at the Lord's Supper something of a mysterious and unaccountable nature, quite different from the effect of the influence of truth upon the mind. When their expectations have, as they suppose, been realized, they have been delighted, while the whole has resulted from a heated imagination, and a strong excitement of their feelings, without any discovery of the glory and excellence of the Gospel of Christ. If they have not obtained what they expected, they are in danger of sinking into despondency. In both cases, the mind is led away from the truth, and the great design and the true nature of the ordinance are quite out of view. By fellowship with God, in such cases, is meant some immediate manifestation of the love of God, quite different from the knowledge and sense of his love which arises from feeding on the doctrines of the cross, and realizing the glories of the divine character as there illustriously displayed. These things ought not so to be among Christians. Genuine enjoyment is that of the disciples, whose hearts burned within them, as Christ, in his conversation, kindly opened to them the Scriptures.

Connected with this is the mistake of confining fel-



lowship with God, to some periods of peculiar enjoyment, in the observance of this or other ordinances. But the appointments to be observed by Christians, are designed to cherish that state of mind which fits for the right discharge of every duty, in the various situations and relations in which we are placed. Religion is not to be confined to public institutions, the Lord's day, or formal acts of devotion, but is to be carried into all the business and affairs, of other days; and of common life. The man who has, on the Lord's day, had his mind directed aright to the things of God, will be devout throughout the whole week. He will eat and drink, and transact his affairs in the world, under the influence of the truths of the Gospel, and will breathe the spirit of a pilgrim and a stranger, whose home is in heaven. But, as the mind is apt to lose sight of the truth, and to decline from God, he needs the benefits of the institutions of Christ; and the return of the Lord's day, and its services revive the tone of the spirit: And, when he afterwards again goes to his lawful engagements in the world, he does so in a proper state. Thus the institutions of Heaven are but means to an end; and if the end, which is the spiritual health of the soul, is not gained by their observance, they have not profited us, and cannot have honoured God. How different this spirit from that of those who observe them chiefly in compliance with custom, or from mere habit, or who imagine that the penance they have endured in performing the services connected with the ordinance of the Supper will atone for their usual carelessness and neglect of God.

It is not merely the warmth which may be felt at the Lord's table, but the practical and daily exercise of true religion, that manifests the proper remembrance of the death of Christ. Warmly, indeed, ought we to feel there, but not there only. The affections have a high place in genuine piety; and deeply, *very deeply*, must a Christian feel, when he meditates on the wonders of the cross, and the glories of that character which there



meets his eye ; but this ought not to be a transient and occasional thing, but a habit. The recurrence of public observances will indeed be of essential service in reviving it, and at such seasons it will often be stronger than at other times ; but still the benefit of this is to be found in our habitual spirituality, and our practical subjection to the Saviour, in the exercise of every Christian principle, and of obedience to every command of his.

Self-examination is a daily duty, and ought not to be neglected when we are about to partake of the Lord's Supper. It becomes us to judge of our faith by its fruits,—to examine the state of our minds, and the reasons which induce us to observe this institution. Having, however, in former letters considered the subject of self-examination, I shall not dwell on it now. Suffice it to say, that we ought to examine what are our views of the Gospel—do they indeed accord with the testimony of God ? We ought to examine our state of mind, for we may have fallen into a very improper state. Not, however, to find an excuse for absenting ourselves, but that, by means of the import of the institution, our sin may be mortified. We should examine our motives for this observance, and seek that, with a proper spirit, and with proper views, we may engage in this act of worship. We should examine our views of the institution, and form them on the word of God.

Allow me to mention, that the preparation necessary to the acceptable observance of this ordinance, is just that preparation which the Lord bestows when he calls sinners by his grace to the blood of atonement, and when he enables them to continue to live by faith in the cross, from a deep sense of their own guilt and helplessness, and of the mercy and love of the Saviour. In the 11th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle is speaking to Christians who had erred in their manner of observing the institution, and not of personal worthiness or unworthiness, in order to partaking or declining to partake of it. They had observed it in an unworthy manner, and he exhorts them to do it in a



worthy, or a proper manner. The word rendered damnation in verse 29, means judgment, as you will see in the margin, and refers to those temporal afflictions which are mentioned in verse 30, and not to eternal woe. The solemn warning here given arose from the abuses into which many had fallen as to the observance of this institution, in consequence of connecting it with a common meal, and observing it apart from their brethren. Not that they were guilty of excess, for the word rendered drunken often means well refreshed, as in John ii. 10 ; and we cannot conceive of persons being addressed as Christians who could indulge in such intemperance. They had mistaken the design of the ordinance, and were no doubt greatly to blame, but they were chastened of the Lord, that they might not be condemned with the world, verse 32, so that their afflictions were intended to awaken them to a sense of their sin, that they might be saved ; and we learn in the next epistle that the end was gained.

No doubt a transgression in regard to this institution, like every other sin, exposes to the displeasure of God ; but there is no warrant for that spirit of terror and bondage, in relation to it, in which many Christians have been held. The Lord invites his people to a privilege, and there is nothing to hinder a Christian from partaking of this feast, prepared for him on his way to the celestial city. The man who thinks that the character necessary to the acceptable observance of this rite may be dispensed with on other occasions, is grossly deluding himself ; for what is it but that very state of mind which results from a life of faith in the Son of God, and from that habitual keeping of the heart with all diligence which is essential to the growth of genuine religion, and which is necessary to acceptance at the tribunal of judgment ?

Never ought it to be forgotten, however, that while an ignorant and superstitious terror ought not to be indulged, yet God is to be had in reverence in the assembly of his saints. Special care should be taken that,



while free from the former, we do not decline in the latter. A careless irreverence, and a rude familiarity, are quite different from warranted Christian confidence. The former is deeply offensive to God and injurious to ourselves, and that man has nothing to rejoice in who can look down on his superstitious neighbours, and bless himself that he can, without fear of any kind, eat and drink at the table of the Lord. The fear which hath torment is expelled in proportion as the Gospel is believed, but in the same proportion is there a holy reverence and a filial fear produced in the heart. It becomes Christians to be watchful against coldness and indifference, and to be fervent in prayer and in holy meditation before engaging in the public services of religion, in order that they may maintain the spirit of sacred devotion in the worship of God. It is a matter of deep regret, when even the external behaviour indicates the want of suitable feelings.

It is deplorable, however, when men act in regard to preparation for this ordinance, as if they meant to qualify themselves for the favour of God, or at least for an interest in the work of the Saviour. How different this spirit from that which distinguishes Christians? Such characters are as far from the truth as are those who regard this ordinance as a fountain in which to wash away sin. How prone are men to abuse the appointments of God, and the most salutary exercises!

It is a matter of deep regret too, that the observance of this institution is often urged chiefly as a thing proper and becoming, on coming to a certain age, without considering, that unless possessed of genuine piety, none can acceptably partake of it. The great duty of parents and others is, in the first instance, to urge upon young people the necessity of a change of mind through the faith of the Gospel. If they give evidence of faith in Christ, by all means earnestly exhort them to obey the whole appointments of the Saviour, in relation to Christian fellowship: but till they give evidence of this, their admission to the peculiar ordinances of the



churches of Christ will only serve to ensnare and deceive them. The effects of this profanation are truly deplorable.

I conclude with reminding you, my dear friend, that we ought to remember the death of Christ with ardent love and profound reverence—with heartfelt contrition and animated joy. Since in this ordinance there is an appeal to the senses, let us be careful that the frequency of such appeals does not weaken their effect ; and, to prevent this, let us with devout attention dwell upon the great things signified. In a word, let us have recourse to the remedies against formality and declension, which the Scriptures point out, among which we do not find infrequency in observance of the Lord's Supper so much as once named. 'The Spirit of God has prescribed watchfulness, brotherly admonition, and counsel ; steadfastness in the profession of the faith ; the maintenance of a holy and heavenly temper of heart, and constancy in the public as well as other duties of fellowship, Heb. iii. 12, 13. ; x. 19—25, 35—39. ; xii. 12—29. ; xiii. 5, 6, 9. We shall thus be preserved from superstitious dread on the one hand, and from careless irreverence on the other. While in holy fellowship we confess our faith in the atonement—in the promises of the everlasting covenant—and in the second coming of the Saviour, we ought ever to view the exercise as designed to assimilate us to the heavenly worshippers, who, while they continually ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb, are also continually employed in active services of obedience. Somewhat, yea much, of their spirit we may attain even here. Let this be sought for in fervent and importunate prayer.—I am, &c.



## LETTER XXIX.

## ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE.

Heaven a seat of worship—Was represented by the figures of the law—Exhibited in visions to the prophets—Christians have access to it—The life of Christ a life of office—Importance of Scriptural views of heavenly worship—Christ the great object of attraction—The view given of the subject in the epistle to the Hebrews—The benefit of the frequent consideration of it—The priestly care and sympathy of the Saviour—Connection between his relative and personal glory.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE repeatedly reminded you of the duty and the privilege of approaching the throne of grace with filial confidence and freedom of speech: Allow me now to call your attention to the worship of the heavenly temple, where this throne is seated. Heaven is not merely the seat of royal power and grandeur; it is a temple, and as such is the seat of exalted and sacred worship. The Redeemer appears there not only in state displaying his dignity and greatness, but ministering in his official character. His life there, no less than his death on earth, is necessary to our salvation, Rom. v. 10. Heb. vii. He does not possess mere personal glory, but likewise relative glory, as our head and representative. There, in a peculiar manner, dwells the God and Father of Christ,—and there all his family are around him, participating in the blissful effects of his goodness—offering up the purest adoration of his excellencies—and uttering the warmest effusions of gratitude for the manifold riches of his grace. There the Saviour officiates as the great mediator in behalf of all in heaven and in earth who are the children of God, and for the purpose of adding to the family, by translating sinners from the kingdom of darkness into his own spiritual and holy fellowship.



Under the ancient dispensation, many representations were given of this glory and worship, which are often referred to in the New Testament, and are of much use still in illustrating this subject. Both the tabernacle in the wilderness, and the temple of Jerusalem, exhibited "a pattern of things in the heavens." The holy place, and particularly the holiest of all, with the ark, the mercy-seat, and the cherubim—the high priest in his sacerdotal robes—his solemn services in the sanctuary, connected with the offering of sacrifice, the sprinkling of blood, and the burning of incense; in a word, the whole of the temple, in its ministers, furniture, and worship, formed a visible representation of the offices, work, and salvation of Christ. The epistle to the Hebrews contains much interesting instruction on this important and delightful subject.

Not only was there given in the sanctuary a constant representation of heavenly things; the prophets had besides this occasional visions and revelations, illustrative of the celestial temple and its sacred services. Isaiah had a vision of God as seated on his throne, above the ark, in the most holy place, where the glory appeared above the cherubim. This vision, we are told by John, related to the kingdom and glory of Christ; and was designed to exhibit the exalted and hallowed nature of that sanctuary which is open to believers of all nations, and in which the earthly holy place has its end. The prophet Ezekiel had several visions, in which he saw the grandeur of our Lord in the heavenly sanctuary, who there unites the priestly censer with the regal sceptre; and likewise beheld the cloud of glory leave the earthly temple, and from Mount Olivet ascend to heaven, as an expressive representation of the termination of the Levitical economy—of the ascension of Christ, the substance of this emblem of the presence from that very mount—and of the commencement of his mediatorial glory in the heavenly temple, where he dwells as the antitype of the Shechinah on the ancient mercy-seat, Ezek. i. 26—28.; x. 4—24.; xi.



22—24. The ancient sanctuary had no light from without. The holy place was illuminated by the sacred candlestick: but the most holy place had not even this light—it was illuminated by the cloud of glory on the mercy-seat. In allusion to this, Isaiah says, “The sun shall no more be thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory,” Isa. lx. 19, 20. The ancient temple was but a small inclosure in Jerusalem; but the whole of the heavenly city shall be “a temple for God and the Lamb,” where the glory of Jehovah shall for ever shine in full effulgence in the face of the Redeemer, illuminating the whole of the celestial Jerusalem, and transforming every worshipper into his image, Rev. xxi. 22, 23.

These representations should be connected with the view given of the camp of Israel in the book of Numbers. There stood the tabernacle where God dwelt, and whose presence made the whole camp holy. The great body of the Israelites were kept at a considerable distance from the sanctuary, and the Levites were allowed to pitch their tents around it; but none but consecrated priests were permitted to enter it to minister before the Lord, and even they were not allowed to enter every part of it; for the most holy place could be entered by none but the high priest, and that only on the annual day of atonement. These appointments served to impress the minds of the people with a deep sense of the Divine holiness and greatness; while they served also to show the glory of the priestly character of Christ, and the dignity and blessedness of that station to which Christians are advanced through him. They are all kings and priests unto God; and, as such, they all have access into the holiest of all, Heb. x. 19, 22. We are treated as the domestics of the Most High, and are allowed the most unrestrained and intimate converse with him. We enjoy privileges which assimilate our station, not merely to that of the people surround-



ing the sanctuary, and praying without in the court ; but to that of the priests who worshipped in the house itself, yea even to that of the high priest, who exclusively worshipped in the holiest of all. He who dwelleth between the cherubim hath shone forth, and invites us even to his seat. We are admitted to the very throne of God, and are free from that servile fear which the state of things among the Israelites naturally cherished. We have access at all times, which even the high priest had not, and may expect a kind and gracious audience in all possible circumstances. And how precious is a place in the sanctuary of God to the man who, knowing that his spirit shall survive the wreck of nature and the crash of worlds, can be happy in nothing but that which will exercise, invigorate, and completely fill his renovated and continually enlarging mind ! In proportion to the clearness of our views of these privileges, as exhibited in the Gospel, and to the degree of our faith, our hope, and our love, will be our freedom from the spirit of slavish dread, and the measure of our filial, joyful, and yet humble confidence in God. Such confidence is the delight of our heavenly Father—it is at once honourable to him, and profitable to us.

The great object of attraction in the heavenly temple is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has entered it as our friend and representative. He has our names upon his breast, and in his heart—he presents our spiritual sacrifices, and obtains their acceptance upon the ground of his one perfect offering. He speaks by his blood, and his blood speaks by its worth. Solemn indeed must be the act of his continued representation of his sacrifice as the ground of his intercession, and the sole foundation of our full redemption and blessedness. When conscious that our best services are stained with guilt, how precious the thought that his offering purges away all our sins ! When sensible that our best services are weak and imperfect, blessed is the recollection of the ample efficacy of his intercession. When bowed down with a sense of our unworthiness, encouraging in-



deed must be the remembrance of his dignity, and the merit of his work. These considerations sweetly incline us to come to him with freedom, and to cast on him all our cares. They tend also to cherish the most reverential awe, by the display which they afford of the holy character of God, and of the necessity of such a mediator. The self-abasement which they produce is tempered, however, by the joy of hope and the confidence of love.

Our high priest lives a public as well as a glorious life. He is, accordingly, denominated the minister of the sanctuary, Heb. viii. 2. and in this character he will officiate there, till the consummation of the plan of mercy. The term minister, indeed, has not in this case the same meaning as when applied to the character he sustained on earth, but it certainly implies official ministration. When kings are termed the shepherds of their people, this appellation by no means derogates from their dignity, it only marks its official nature, and intimates that their powers are exercised in behalf of their subjects, and not merely for personal purposes. There is a difference, doubtless, between them and our Lord; and therefore it is only to a certain extent that their character can illustrate his.

On the constant ministrations of the Saviour in the heavenly sanctuary depends our safety, amidst all the snares, the temptations, and the perils of this scene of conflict. Hence the Scriptures represent him as dwelling and sitting in the temple of his Father and his God. This view of his character and his station is fitted to keep and gladden the heart—to dissipate all gloom and despondency—and to stimulate to active exertion and patient suffering. In this exalted glory he exercises the warmest and most engaging love, pity, and tenderness, towards his people in all their difficulties and trials. He is ever attentive to their returning wants, and liberally supplies them according to their varied and ever-changing circumstances.—The persuasion of this relieves and supports the mind, as it dwells



on him who left the world in the act of blessing his disciples, and whose affection towards his people is the same now as in the days of his flesh. In his public and official ministrations in heaven, he manifests to his brethren in the great congregation the wondrous character of God. He leads them to the unveiled glory of Jehovah—enriches their understanding with inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and knowledge—stamps the image of his excellencies on all their faculties, dispositions, and affections—and imparts to them bliss and satisfaction, the purest and most exalted. The worship of the sanctuary is a constant and a fervent adoration of the many and inestimable glories of the divine character; and as the redeemed advance in knowledge of the transcendent excellencies of the God and Father of the Saviour, their admiration is enlarged, and their devotion becomes more profound; while knowing that they never fully can comprehend their boundless extent, they anticipate enjoyment inexhaustible, and prepare for yet higher strains of animated and heavenly worship. In that happy land there is necessarily a constant tendency towards an increase of all that is holy and blissful. The heavenly temple is the seat of light, order, and love, where every worshipper and every object has an appropriate place, and where all add to the general harmony.

• In this world we can know but little of the refreshing and exhilarating pleasure which abounds at the right hand of God, and of the enjoyment which must result from the blissful communications of the Saviour to his people. Little do we know, of the increasing delight with which a mind, freed from all spiritual disorders, and elevated to the steadfast contemplation of all that is holy and excellent, pursues the investigation of heavenly and sacred things. Feeble must be our conceptions of that ardour of affection, and that immutable cleaving of the heart, with which it must dwell on the attractive beauties of the Saviour's character. It is but faintly that we can enter into that holy triumph and eleva-



tion of spirit with which the redeemed rise above all that is here, and glory in the wondrous issue of that grace through which they have become more than conquerors. It is our duty, however, to make these subjects familiar to us, and to advance in the knowledge of them. The nearest approach which we can make on earth to the spirit of the celestial temple, is in the contemplation of the nature, exercises, and the happiness of the general assembly and church of the first-born ; in entering into their views, and uniting with them in the hallowed service of ascribing glory to God and the Lamb. There must be happiness unspeakable in endeavouring to imitate them in their holy and spiritual affection, and in seeking to participate in their estimate of this vain and dying world, and of that glory with which the evils of time are not worthy to be compared. It is in thus entering within the veil, and imbibing the spirit which there reigns, that we from principle condemn the boasted glories of time, and rise superior to their fascinating power. As long as our views of the heavenly glory are weak and imperfect, our services and our character must be far beneath what they might be, and temptations must have an influence of the most perilous kind.

Scriptural views of the heavenly holy place, its high exercises, and its sacred joys, are at the foundation of all spiritual worship, and all excellence of character. When set beside the glory of the Redeemer, and that of his people in the world of light, the glory of this passing scene is completely eclipsed, and the strange spell and bewitching enchantment which bound us to this poor unsatisfying portion, lose their hold of our hearts. The thought of the safety and the blessedness of our brethren above, of the means by which they overcame the difficulties and trials of life, of the connection which even now subsists between us and them, as children of the same family, and heirs of the same inheritance ; of our interest in that same grace through which they have weathered the storm, and of the day when we



shall be with them in person, must have a soothing, animating, and sanctifying effect. Heaven is thus viewed as the seat of our family, and our final home. There dwells our Father, who is not ashamed to be called our God, since he hath prepared for us such an inheritance. There resides our Friend and our Redeemer, who is not ashamed to call us his brethren. There are the departed spirits of the just, some of whom were near and dear to us on earth, and whose memory we cherish still with the fondest affection, and thither we expect soon to go ourselves. Our citizenship, then, is in heaven, and as denizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, we are as pilgrims and strangers here, looking for the Saviour from heaven, who hath kindly said, that he will come and receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also.

Surely, then, it becomes us to value our home above all other places. Is it not at once our duty and our interest to get acquainted with its nature and its blessings? Ought we not to get familiar with its enjoyments—to long for it—to hold such intercourse with it, as the present state will admit,—to manifest its spirit, and to seek increasing meetness for its pure and spiritual glory? In this way we have fellowship with the heavenly worshippers;—we enter within the veil, and have blissful intercourse with God; we anticipate the work of heaven, and we taste of its joys; we feel ourselves in the presence of our Lord, and we become assimilated to his glory. This is the very life of genuine religion, and of spiritual devotion. The most exalted view which we can form of the blessedness of heaven, and of its sacred services, is that of dwelling on the glory of God, as exhibited in the Redeemer, and of progressively advancing in likeness to his character. We err most egregiously if we do not habituate ourselves to the contemplation of the true sanctuary, and employ not our thoughts and our cares, our heart and affections, on the heavenly seat of worship and of bliss.

I have mentioned to you, that the great object of at-



traction in the heavenly sanctuary, is the Redeemer himself. He is ever beheld officiating in our behalf, offering up the services of his people, and procuring for them the blessings of redemption. There he watches over the least and the feeblest of his brethren, and the sight of his kindness produces the sweetest satisfaction and complacency. No one can touch the members on earth, but He, the head, feels it in heaven. When called to scenes of trying duty, severe affliction, or fearful alarm, we shall find relief and encouragement in him. A view of him at the right hand of God gladdened the mind of the martyr Stephen, and enabled him calmly and joyfully to commend to him his spirit. And in that solemn hour, when life is hastening to extinction,—when human aid is felt to be powerless,—when the memory of the past is fading away, and the present ceases to interest,—in a word, when eternity in all its magnitude is about to burst upon our view, even then, when all is at stake, the faith of the character and the glory of Christ can enable us to rejoice in the thought that all is perfectly safe, and that all before us is inconceivably glorious and delightful.

The contemplation of this glory should be, not an occasional, but a stated employment. In this delightful exercise we are aided by the scriptural representation of the sanctuary. Were nothing unfolded respecting its nature, and had we only general declarations respecting the love and the care of our Lord, we should be greatly at a loss. But the particular account given us of the character and work of our High Priest, of the nature and the services of the heavenly temple, and of the way in which we have access to God, and in which he communicates of his goodness to us, is admirably calculated to enlighten, sanctify, and gladden the heart. He who knows our frame, hath in this way adapted all to our nature and character. The description of the Levitical sanctuary is of great service still in illustrating the glory of the heavenly holy place. To the former there is a constant reference in describing the latter. It must,



then, be of great moment to understand well the typical economy, for our faith is by this means assisted by our senses, and the truth takes the firmer hold of the heart.

Jesus, when on earth, gave or offered himself to be slain as a sacrifice; and his death, as such, finished the whole of those ~~positive~~ sufferings which are included in the curse of the law; but as, under the ancient economy, an ~~important~~ service remained to be performed after slaying the victim, namely, that of the priest's taking of its blood into the sanctuary of God, and sprinkling it before Him; so Christ, as the apostle has told us, Heb. ix. 11, 12, 24. had to enter with his own blood into the celestial temple, and, after presenting it to God, to take his seat "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The service of the Jewish high priest, on the annual day of atonement, was the most solemn and particular of all the Levitical services, and must, therefore, have something particularly corresponding to it in the priestly ministry of the antitype.

Permit me to call your attention, for a little, to the interest attached to this subject in the epistle to the Hebrews. The apostle reproves them for their declension in knowledge and in piety. He says, that they needed to be taught again what were the first principles of the oracles of God, and had become such as have need of milk, and could not digest strong meat. He proposes, however, to lead them forward from first principles to the higher branches of the Christian faith, though he had great difficulties in doing so, in consequence of the slothful state of their minds. Now, in what does he endeavour to lead them forward? An answer to this will be found in the following part of the epistle, particularly in chaps. vii. viii. ix. x. and xii. We are there directed to the complete consecration of the Saviour—to his mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary—to his investiture with office in his glorified state—to his entrance, as the immortal Son of God raised from the dead, into the celestial temple—to the presentation of his offering there in the midst of departed



spirits and of holy angels—to the Divine acceptance of his sacrifice, and the Divine complacency in it—to his session at the right hand of power, as a priest upon his throne, accompanied with the oath of Jehovah, declaring him a priest after the order of Melchisedec—to his intercession—his government of the sanctuary and of the church of God—his lordship over all worlds in behalf of his spiritual kingdom,—and to his high ministrations as thus elevated in heaven.

Our attention is particularly directed to the consecration of the heavenly sanctuary. Having completed the atonement, by appearing in the celestial world with his sacrifice, and there presenting it unto God, the Saviour thereby consecrated heaven for a dwelling-place and a sanctuary to his people. The Levitical tabernacle being defiled by the sins of the Israelites, had to be purified annually by the sprinkling of blood, Lev. xvi. 15—17. And even before it became the seat of their worship, the earthly sanctuary and all its furniture were by this means purified, and so set apart for the use of the people, in order to show that the access of the worshippers to God, and their acceptance in his sight, were solely through the blood of atonement. In like manner, the appearance of our Lord with his sacrifice in heaven was necessary, in order that it might be set apart for the use, and opened for the admission of sinners, Heb. ix. 21—24. Heaven must have been defiled by their admission, if an atonement had not been made for their sins.

While the high priest was purifying the earthly sanctuary, there was no man allowed to be within it but himself. On other occasions, the priests, Levites, and people, were in it in their different places, but on this solemn occasion the whole assembled tribes of Israel were excluded. They were thus most impressively taught, that sinners can have no access to God, except through a mediator, the awful consequences of sin as excluding from the favour and family of God, and that the whole work of redemption devolves exclusively on



the Saviour. In consequence of sin, all men are, according to their desert, under a sentence of exclusion from the house and favourable presence of God. But as, after the propitiatory services of the high priest were performed, the sanctuary was open to all, so now that Christ hath finished the work of atonement, the very holiest of all is laid open to every individual of mankind, who chooses to enter it in his name. The sentence of exclusion is in this sense reversed. If a man does not believe this, he will refuse or neglect to enter, but the way remains clear, so that he has himself to blame if he enjoys not the benefit. But the faith of the Gospel has its immediate issue in coming to him who is within the veil, and taking of the water of life freely. When the sanctuary was purified, the people had access to it for the following year, at the end of which it was again shut, and had again to be cleansed. But Christ having consecrated the heavenly temple, it never can be defiled, and from it we shall never be excluded. The heavenly things which are said to be purified cannot mean the church and its worship, for we are expressly told in the verse which immediately follows, that that which answers to the purification of the earthly sanctuary is Christ's entering into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.—Had the guilty been admitted into heaven without any regard to an atonement for their sins, then heaven had been defiled, even (supposing it to be possible) although they had at the time of their entrance been perfect in holiness. The subject in question is not their meetness for heaven, but the ground on which they are received into it, which of course relates to what was their original character. By the atonement of Christ then, the purity of the celestial sanctuary is preserved, while the guilty have access to it.

This, however, is not all that is included in the purification in question. Let it be considered, that the sacrifices were generally not only expiatory, in the strict sense of the expression, they were designed to be propitiatory; that is, they not only cancelled guilt and so freed from



punishment, they obtained for the guilty an interest in the special blessings of the covenant of God. The death of the victim denoted the former, and the sprinkling of the blood before God solemnly signified the latter. These two things were considered by the law as but different parts of the same sacrificial service, and accordingly, when the Scriptures speak of the one offering of Christ, they oppose it to the numerous sacrifices of the Levitical economy, and not to the different services which were required in regard to the same sacrifice. By his death he cancelled guilt, and so obtained "eternal redemption" from the curse, by bearing the desert of our sins "in his own body on the tree," because he then finished the whole of those positive sufferings which are comprehended in the curse of the law, as is proved by his resurrection and glory. But to show that he had not only ransomed his people from death, or merely restored them to what they had lost through sin, but had also by his propitiation laid the foundation of their access to God as his God and Father,—of their admission into that hallowed community of which he himself is head—and of their entrance into that celestial inheritance which is the reward of his work, he entered into heaven as our representative and forerunner; and, as it were, sprinkled the mercy-seat with his blood, as a solemn demonstration that all that *superabundance* of blessing which shall there be enjoyed is communicated to sinners through the infinite merit of his sacrifice. Thus heaven is said to be purified in the sense of being set apart for the use of the redeemed in a way which reflects the highest honour on the character and government of God. By the appearance of Christ, then, with his blood in the sanctuary, we are taught to ascribe the enjoyment of heaven as well as deliverance from wrath to his previous atonement. Our participation in the blessings of the former, was signified by the sprinkling of the blood upon the people; and our participation in the latter was denoted by the sprinkling of the book of the covenant, of the sanctuary, of the altar, and of all the vessels employed in the divine ser-



vices. (*Familiar survey of the Old and New Covenants*, chap. iii. sec. v.)

Our attention, dear friend, is also turned to the general assembly and church of the first born,—to the legal and blissful perfection of the departed spirits of the just,—to the union of all saints in heaven and on earth into one body,—to the union of redeemed sinners and holy angels into one glorious community under Christ as their common head; and in a particular manner to his high character as a priest, not of an earthly, but of a spiritual and heavenly sanctuary,—not of one people only, but of all in every place who come to God by him,—not subject to infirmity and death, but as the conqueror of the grave, and as possessed of an everlasting life in an immortal, vigorous, spiritual, and glorious body,—not holding his office for a time only, but for ever; and as invested with it, not by descent, but by immediate appointment of God. We are also directed forward to the time when he shall come again; not, as at first, to be a sacrifice for sin, but as the great high-priest, to bless his people with complete and eternal salvation, and with all the mercies of the everlasting covenant. As when the Jewish high priest was in the sanctuary, the people stood without, waiting his return to bless them, so, in regard to actual personal presence, we are without, while in this world, waiting for the second coming of our Lord, Num. vi. 22—27. Luke i. 21. Phil. iii. 20. Heb. ix. 27, 28. Then he shall appear as the blessed bond of connexion among the various parts of the community gathered into one, the medium of fellowship between God and his people, and the substance of the dignities and joys of the glorified creation. Col. ii. 4. 1 John iii. 2. Rev. vii. 14—17. and xxi. 22, 23.

We are taught farther, that already we are come to this blessed assembly, which is cemented by likeness of disposition and character—sameness of privileges and blessing, and by corresponding exercises and enjoyments,—that already we have access by faith into the seat of



their bliss : and that a measure of their joys may even now be possessed. In this way we are led to consider all that preceded as leading to the establishment of the Church of Christ,—to view his kingdom as the commencement of heaven,—to consider the services of Christians on earth as the means of fellowship with the celestial worshippers ; and to remember, that this present state of things is a preparation for the final glory of his name and his people. We thus acquire a tone of sublimity which elevates us above all low pursuits and worldly affections. The power of temptation is thus neutralized, and we attain that singleness of heart which consists in having but one object, desire, and pursuit ; namely, the glory and the enjoyment of God.

The place given to this subject by the apostles merits your regard. When they preached to the world, they dwelt on first principles ; such as the guilt and wretchedness of men—their inability to deliver themselves—the love of God, in giving his Son—the love of Christ, in becoming obedient unto death—the resurrection and glory of the Redeemer, as the great proof of the sufficiency and acceptance of his atonement, and on the way in which sinners obtain the benefit of it through faith. On the subject of the glory of Christ, they, in such circumstances, spoke in general terms only, and chiefly for the purpose of proving the perfection of the atonement, the certainty of salvation to all who believed, and the certain condemnation of the impenitent. But when their object was to edify believers, and to lead them forward to the higher branches of the Gospel, they dwelt upon it in the most particular manner, and exhibited it in its many and various bearings and connexions. They connected it all in particular with his ~~cross~~ and sacrifice, and showed how his humiliation and his heavenly elevation mutually illustrated each other, Rom. viii. 14—39. 1 Cor. xv. 47—58. Ephes. ii. 4—13. and iii. 5—21. Col. i. 12—22.

Permit me, then, to recommend to you the frequent consideration of this subject. You will find it consoling,



gladdening, and purifying. It is but little of it that can be known here, but much more might be known than is, did we enter into it as we ought. The full light of it we could not bear, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But when we drop this body, we shall see the Divine glory as it shines in the Saviour, and seeing him as he is, we shall be like to him. Then, like the priests of old, we shall feed on the provision of the house of God, and shall be satisfied in the enjoyment of the blessed fruits of the sacrifice of Christ. Then shall our happiness be uninterrupted and unmingled. In the full enjoyment of bliss, and an immortality of glory, nothing shall disturb our repose—no shade of grief shall ever be known—no moment of uneasiness shall ever pass over us. Our God himself shall be our light, and he who freed us from guilt and ruin will with his own hands give us our inheritance: And will it not add to our joy in the reception and enjoyment of the crown, that it is bestowed by Him who once shared our sorrows? In drinking of the fountain of the water of life, we shall think of his groans and his sorrows when for us he drank of the bitter cup of tribulation.

Delightful it will be, directly to witness, in the celestial sanctuary, the workings of that love which, in the height of his glory, burns as warmly as ever. Sweet to the soul is the thought, that in the face of the Man of Sorrows, “whose visage was once marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men,” the divine glory shall for ever illustriously shine. Most consoling is the hope of entering into that joy, the prospect of which animated his soul amidst the horrors of the curse. To see justice done to his character—to see his worth acknowledged and applauded by his God—to witness the reward of his varied and manifold excellencies; and to mark the benevolent and pious exultation of his heart, as he surveys the glory and the blessedness of the new creation, will surely fully gratify his redeemed, and swell their songs of triumph and of joy, John xvii. 24. Rev. v. 8—14.



Even now there is much of this enjoyed when the mind turns to his glory, and remembers that his grandeur lessens not his love, but is valued by him as the means of blessing us. Though Christ be in the highest heavens, he is there as a priest. Now, it is necessary that, in that character, he should be full of compassion. He, of course, can be no longer qualified for the place he holds than he continues to be of a gracious and merciful disposition; and he can no longer act in it than he shows all kindness and sympathy towards those who come to him for refuge, and seek for happiness in his heavenly and holy temple, Heb. v. 2. In the cause of sinners he suffered and he died on earth, and never can he forget that for which he endured so much, Isa. xlix. 15, 16.

Every thing that rends our heart has rent His:—and every stroke we bear has been borne by Him. He knows our trials and wants, not merely because being God he knows all things, but because he has had actual experience in our nature of all the difficulties and afflictions to which flesh is heir. Such is our nature, that this interests us more than the divine omniscience, simply considered. On this ground the apostle builds his reasoning respecting the fitness of our Lord for the tender and affectionate discharge of the whole of that sympathetic official work which is necessary in a priest, Heb. iv. 15. He not only says, that so God appointed it, but that the lot of Christ was most suited to the close and endearing relation which subsists between him and his people, as well as most suited to the great object which he had in view, namely, to conform them to that glorious character exhibited in his cross, Heb. ii. 10—12, 17, 18.

What is he doing in heaven, but reaping what he sowed below? His reaping this in the celestial temple, is the very life of his mediatorial bliss, so that our interests are bound up with the joys of his abundant harvest. The more that we cheerfully suffer and do for another, the more ardent does our love for him become. We see



this in parents towards their children, and particularly towards such of them as have been most weakly and sickly. These last have most occupied the thoughts and feelings of the heart, by which means the principle of affection has been greatly strengthened. On this principle the peculiarly warm affection of a mother is accounted for. Let this be applied to the love of Christ. His affection for us has been increased and invigorated in the furnace of tribulation, the most afflicting and severe. In this way we have been written upon his heart, and never can the writing be effaced.

Not only is he independently happy as Emmanuel, he has also a capacity for happiness as the head of his body, the church. Personally considered, he is complete in himself, but as the head of his body, he has an additional relative fulness springing from the blessedness and the glory of his members, Eph. i. 22, 23. Now, as happiness is in a high degree the companion and the result of activity in behalf of our friends, so this is enjoyed by the Saviour in the constant ministration of the sanctuary, and in the unceasing exercise of his grace, and his mercy towards his people. He is blessed himself in imparting to them the blessings of redemption. In seeing them pardoned and comforted, sanctified and preserved, his soul is delighted. The more that they are filled with the goodness and the salvation of God, the more happy is he, Luke x. 21. Heb. xii. 2. Isa. lxii. 3—5. Zeph. iii. 17. He sees in this the fruit of his labour, and the effect of his grace; he sees his word and his character glorified, the honour of his Father promoted, examples of excellence exhibited for the present and future benefit of others, and his soul is gratified in the prospect of such being one day with him to behold his glory and to participate in his joys. His love to God, his benevolence towards men, and his respect for all that is excellent, are thus strikingly displayed. These views of his blessedness are included in the saying of the prophet, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied," Isa. liii. 10, 11.



ployed for the purpose of showing the nature of that rest which God hath provided for his children.

When God, after employing six days in the work of creation, is said to have rested on the seventh, the meaning cannot be, that being fatigued he needed repose, but that he ceased from the work of creating. It denotes also, in a particular manner, his satisfaction and enjoyment in contemplating the works of his hands, as illustrative of certain parts of his character. Accordingly, he declared all his works to be good, and is said to have been refreshed in beholding them, Gen. i. 31. compared with Exod. xxxi. 17. He was happy, that is, in contemplating them, because they were a manifestation of his power, wisdom, and goodness.

He blessed the seventh day, or exalted it above other days; and he sanctified it, or set it apart for holy purposes,—by appointing it to be devoted in a particular manner to religious services. It was designed for the use of man, as a representation of, and a means of his entering into a participation of that rest, or enjoyment, which God had in his works; for the happiness of rational creatures must ever arise from fellowship with God in his blessedness. Rest from labour was enjoined on man, then, not merely that he might repose himself, though this, it is true, was one reason of the appointment; but chiefly that, being set free from his daily exertions, he might bend his undivided attention to the contemplation and enjoyment of God, and might have a certain portion of time to spend in direct devotion and intercourse with him. Of course, therefore, it was in certain respects but a means to an end. While in innocence he would ever be spiritually-minded; but it does not follow from this that it was unnecessary to set apart a particular time for devotion. If this was necessary in a state of innocence, it must be much more so to us, whose minds are distracted by sin, and in danger of forgetting the truth, and losing a devotional spirit amidst the cares of the world. Hence the observance of one day in seven as sacred to God, is required now, as well



as in former periods, and it is found to be a sweet and profitable retreat even to those who most fully unite business with devotion.

The importance of special seasons for devotion, was taught by the law, which required that the sacrifices should be doubled on the Sabbath day, Num. xxviii. 3, 9. Though Christians, whether they eat or drink, are to do all to the glory of God, they are edified by appointments in the observance of which their intercourse with God is more immediate, and their worship is more like that of the celestial sanctuary.

With an eye to the old creation, the erection of the kingdom of Christ is called the creation "of new heavens and a new earth," Isa. lxv. 17, and lxvi. 22. The Saviour finished the work of atonement; he laid the foundation of the church in his perfect sacrifice; and he entered into his rest when he rose from the dead and ascended into glory. The work of redemption, or the new and spiritual creation, to which the first had been subservient, is that in which the divine character is fully unfolded. It is in a striking sense the work of Christ, and the rest into which he hath entered is no less strikingly his own. He so rests from his works as to rest in them, Heb. iv. 10. God rested or enjoyed the manifestation of his character given in the work of the old creation; and Christ hath entered into bliss unutterable in the contemplation and enjoyment of the divine character, as manifested in the works of the new creation. The happiness of God arises from the contemplation and enjoyment of those principles or perfections which constitute his character; and hence he delighted when in the works of creation he saw certain of them visibly displayed. But his character is best displayed in the work of his Son, and hence he had expressed his highest delight, and his ineffable satisfaction in that work.

As the pale emanations of the moon walking in her brightness, are absorbed and lost in the effulgence of the sun, so the first creation, though certainly glorious,



fades away before the surpassing splendour of the new. Think of the many moral obstructions which opposed the righteous and honourable exercise of mercy to sinners, and see how fully they have all been removed by the Saviour. Contemplate the polluted, depraved, and miserable condition of mankind, and see an innumerable multitude of them bearing an image of God, and restored to heavenly knowledge, holiness, and love. Consider the power displayed in the complete command of their minds, in preserving them through all the temptations of the world, in reviving them when languishing, recovering them when fallen, and beautifying them with salvation, till they are presented before God without spot or blemish. In this moral creation, there are more grand and decisive displays of the divine wisdom and power, than in the original production of the universe; and in this manifestation of all his moral perfections the Father rests with ineffable delight, as the brightest effulgence of his glory. Jesus, likewise, as Mediator, is blessed in enjoying the light of his Father's countenance, and beholding his character as displayed in his own work.\* In the heavenly temple his happiness arises from that in which Jehovah delights. In like manner do we enter into the rest of God, because our happiness, as Christians, arises from "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." This high privilege we have, when our enjoyment springs from the knowledge of the divine character as exhibited in the Gospel. "It is life eternal to know God, and him whom he hath sent;" or, in other words, to have a just sense of the divine character, as revealed in the work of the Mediator, and in the glory that hath followed, 1 John i. 3. John xvii. 3.

When the Redeemer, by his obedience unto death, had purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of God, there to enjoy that blessed rest which hath followed, and results from his wondrous sufferings and work. This rest is not merely a cessation from labour, or repose after tribulation, it is perfect complacency in the



divine character, glory, and excellency, as displayed in the building of mercy which is established on his precious atonement; it is the complete enjoyment of blessedness in the favour of his God and Father; and it is the delightful gratification of his pious and benevolent wishes in the redemption of sinners to the family, the love, and the services of Jehovah. His life is not a life of state merely, but a life of office. Hence heaven is called a temple; and his blessedness is represented as arising from what he did when in his representative or public character he entered it as a sanctuary, with the blood of the everlasting covenant, and from what he is still doing there. The new creation, like the old, is a gradual work. The foundation of it was laid on the atonement of Christ, and considering its nature, this was the grandest and most important part of it, and hence he is represented as having then entered into his rest. But, as at the end of each successive day, the Lord said of his works, that they were good, and rested in them, as a partial display of his character, so the Saviour has satisfaction in witnessing the successive stages of this spiritual creation; and as on the seventh day, when the whole was finished, God in a particular manner rested and was refreshed; so at the final consummation of the plan of mercy, the Redeemer, on surveying the glories of the new creation, will in the fullest sense "rest and be satisfied." How interesting to him, then, must it be, to contemplate the progress of this moral renovation, as it advances from dispensation to dispensation, unfolding one part of the divine glory after another, removing evil after evil, and brightening more and more, until, in its most perfect lustre, it shall exhibit the meridian sunshine of the divine character and perfections.

The Levitical priests entered the earthly holy place with the blood of others, but Jesus entered heaven with his own blood. When they had performed the appointed services they retired, but the Saviour remains in the heavenly holy place. There he continues to declare the



name, or character of God, in the continued representation of his sacrifice, which is made by his appearing as a Lamb that has been slain ; by his continual intercession on the ground of this atonement ; by the communication of all blessings through it, by the government of all the affairs of providence, in subserviency to his church, and by appointing and guiding all the worship of the sanctuary of God, in connection with his own perfect offering.

The whole affairs of this lower world are connected with the advancement of his kingdom to his ultimate perfection. When these heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and this world, and all its works shall be burned up, the new creation shall remain. The holy and spiritual principles of the humbled and purified heart, in which all that assimilates to God will be found to dwell, are destined to survive the wreck of nature, and to shine forth in their highest glory in the light of heaven. For what is this world but a piece of scaffolding, erected for the sake of the spiritual temple, and to be removed when the building is completed ? Then shall the heavenly structure be revealed in all its beauty, grandeur, and glory. This new creation, like the old, though it consists of a great variety of parts, is but one work ; and hence the sacred writers make the most rapid and apparently abrupt transitions from one part of it to another ; as, for instance, from the first to the second coming of Christ, and from some particular stage of his administration backwards to its commencement, and forward to its close. In all this great work, the heart of the Redeemer exults. It is the delight of his heart to unfold the manifold wisdom, the immaculate purity, the perfect holiness, justice, and faithfulness of God, in union with the love, mercy, and grace which distinguish his character. In looking to the consummation of the plan of redemption, and to the salvation and blessedness of the general assembly and church of the first born, he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied. This is the rest into which he hath entered.



The nature of it is most honourable to him, and most interesting and delightful to us.

Fellowship with him in this bliss is the rest set before us in the Gospel, and in fellowship with him is refreshing and satisfying joy. In this we participate, when we unite with our great High Priest in blessing in his official character—"his Father, and our Father, his God and our God," for his deliverance from the grave, and from all the effects of the curse, and for the bestowment of all the blessings of his kingdom. Not that the Saviour is considered as merely a member of the heavenly community; far, very far from it, He is the glorious head of his body the church, and it is as such that he communicates life and every blessing to his members, and also guides them in acts of devotion.—To allude to the language of an eminent writer, the Son, as the Head of the redeemed, leads the worshippers of the higher house in their expressions of reverence, love, and subjection, as a part of his mediatorial glory. (*Dr. Erskine's discourses*, vol. i. p. 495.) In this worship there is heard one universal acclamation of praise, on every side there is seen the constant overflow of gratitude, and in every heart there is ever felt the most sacred and transporting bliss.

In commemoration of the resurrection and glory of Christ, the day of rest has been changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, which is hence termed "the Lord's day," Rev. i. 10. The mind is thus turned to that great work, for the sake of which the world was created; so that the two creations are here, so to say, united. The day on which he rose, and that on which he ascended, were the same day of the week, and both events are commemorated together.—Indeed, it was not till his ascension into heaven, that he fully took possession of the throne, as the conqueror of death; and hence the high glory into which the Redeemer then entered is celebrated, as distinguishing the day on which it was received, Ps. cxviii. 22, compared with verse 24, and Acts iv. 11. On that day the first Christians met



for the observance of all the stated institutions of Christ ; and he himself honoured it while on earth by different appearances among his disciples, who even then assembled on it, Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xi. 20, compared with chap. xvi. 1, 2. John xx. 19—26. On that day they met, in particular, for the observance of the Lord's supper, in which his death is commemorated ; the observance of this rite on the very day sacred to the memory of his resurrection, beautifully connecting the memorial of the one with that of the other. The contemplation of the resurrection of Christ necessarily leads to the contemplation of his death, and indeed cannot be separated from it, and how delightful then to unite their respective memorials !—In meditating on the rest into which he hath entered, it is edifying to observe, at the same time, that institution which directly leads us to the solemn scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary. When at last we come to the seat of his heavenly rest, we shall dwell with deep and heartfelt interest on those affecting scenes ; and how blessed now to anticipate the enjoyments of heaven !

In commemorating on the Lord's day his resurrection from the dead, we commemorate an event in which we have the fullest confirmation of the accomplishment of his work, and a satisfactory assurance of our own resurrection. We profess our faith in the perfection of his atonement, and declare that all our hope arises from that work from and in which he rests,—we express our joy in contemplating the divine delight in it, as manifested by his life from the dead, and thus have fellowship with God in his blessedness,—we declare that, viewing ourselves as but pilgrims and strangers on earth, we look to his temple as our home ; and that our highest desire is to resemble Him in character, and to partake with Him in his rest,—we express our love to his name, and to his people with whom we unite in the observance of the day ; and we view it as an emblem of the heavenly state, as a state of rest, devotion, and enjoyment, in which we shall exult at once in the death



and the resurrection of the Saviour, blessing for ever the Lamb who was slain, and glorying in Him as the resurrection and the life. ~~This~~ <sup>is</sup> the spirit which makes such a day a foretaste of glory.—This is the feast of solemn and delightful feeling—the very Sabbath of the mind, and the commencement of heaven.

Heaven is a state of *rest*.—There we shall rest from all labour and employments connected with the body. Many are the cares connected with our bodies at present, and it is our duty to attend to what they require ; for we are not warranted to neglect them. But though in the necessary cares and business of life, we serve God, still to an immortal spirit there is much in them that is tedious and unpleasant ; and it is not inconsistent with the spirit of piety to long for a higher state of religious service. Much time is consumed in what is in itself but irksome to a rational being, and the attention is often diverted from things of higher importance, and occupied exclusively by perishing trifles. This latter circumstance is especially painful. The former sensation had not been so powerfully felt had man never known any higher state than that allotted him on earth ; but the stupendous revelation of the divine glory, which is afforded us in the Gospel, has the effect of attracting the mind to the celestial world, and elevating us to the contemplation of those exalted enjoyments which are in the immediate presence of God. Still, the recollection that God hath placed us here—that it is he who appoints our lot,—and that he is glorified, when, in the ordinary business of life, as well as in direct acts of worship, we keep his designs and his glory in view, reconciles the mind to the will of Providence, and even cheers the heart amidst the cares of this world. But in the heavenly state there will be no farther occasion to inquire after supplies for bodily wants. All the distresses arising from these vile bodies, shall in like manner terminate. We shall have a spiritual body, not subject to hunger, thirst, weariness, or disease, 1 Cor. xv. 42—44, 50. Not only will the soul be no longer engaged in



the earthly and ensnaring concerns that relate to the body, but neither will it toil, as at present, in the laborious pursuit of knowledge, which is often a weariness to the flesh, but will acquire information by a kind of intuition, 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

We shall have rest also from the assaults of enemies. In this present state we are ever in danger from our spiritual foes. Many are the attacks made upon us by the objects of sense—the smiles and the frowns of the world—the errors and lies of Satan and his emissaries,—and the sinful passions and affections of the corrupt principle which dwells in us. Sometimes our spirits languish, and our strength fails. Frequent and daily struggles, with inward evils, and outward temptation, sink our hearts; especially when we have been foiled, or an advantage has been gained against us. But in the heavenly world no enemy can appear,—there no error will disturb us,—there we shall be freed from the entanglements of this earthly scene—our warfare shall terminate, and we shall enjoy complete and undisturbed tranquillity, Isa. lvii. 2. Rev. xiv. 13. Let the hope of this animate us while yet in the field of conflict.

We shall have rest from all the sorrows and troubles of the present state. Here we are ever exposed to vexation and anxiety—to fear and to sorrow. From all these, and from every thing else which can assail our peace, we shall rest. Nothing from without, and nothing from within will disturb us. No desire will be ungratified.—Our enjoyment will have no sting, and our joy will never disorder us.

But heaven is not only a place of rest from what is distressing.—It is a state of the most exalted devotion, and of the highest spiritual enjoyment. Christians are said to enter into rest in heaven, not only because they there rest from their labours, but because being set free from the necessary cares and incumbrances of the present life, they are wholly employed in contemplating, serving, and enjoying God. The heavenly rest, then, is not a state of inactivity; for action is essential to our



happiness. Rest, in this case, is opposed to fatigue and inquietude, and not to active service. It is but one of the many figures employed to illustrate future bliss, from each of which, some of its diversified glories may be learned. This rest, then, is entering into the rest of God ; it is to participate in his bliss ; and this arises from conformity to his character, as manifested in Christ. Now positive likemindedness to him is connected with the exercise of our principles and faculties in his service. It is so here, and it will be so there. The enjoyments of heaven are not so much different in kind, as in degree, from those bestowed on earth. The Sabbath above is not a mere ceasing from sin, but the exercise of all those holy principles which form the Christian character. There we shall for ever contemplate, and progressively advance in the knowledge of God. We shall observe, and study the excellencies of his works and character. This will excite the most ardent love to him, and will cause the most exalted delight in his favour. There no dulness of apprehension will ever be felt—no perplexed reasonings or false conclusions, will ever mislead. There the perceptions of the Divine glory will produce the most sublime devotion. How delightful to turn from this world of vanity to the paradise above, where every natural and moral imperfection, and every evil shall be excluded ; where all our faculties shall be enlarged ; where every object fitted to satisfy them shall abound, and where, existing in immortal vigour, we shall rise higher and higher in the scale of excellence and blessedness, while the living God shall exist.

Lord's days below are days of solemn convocation, Lev. xxiii. 3. and in the heavenly temple the general assembly and church of the first-born will meet to celebrate for ever the most sacred worship. Jesus is the centre of their union, and in this great assembly he acts as their leader, though not only in this character. He imparts, for instance, all those principles and dispositions which fit for the service of the sanctuary,—he directs in the hallowed songs of adoration and thanksgiv-



ing which are there incessantly sung,—he, in particular, “takes the cup of salvation;” Ps. cxvi. 13. and directs the redeemed family in the delightful exercise of blessing his Father for all his goodness to him and to them. He hath sat down on the right hand of God in a glorious eternal rest, not only from, but in, his finished work, as an adequate display of the divine glory, and as a proper foundation for eternal and exalted worship. In this rest all the redeemed partake with him, rejoicing and glorifying God with him, and entering into all his devotional feelings and sacred views.—Through him Christians, even whilst on earth, partake, in a measure, of this rest, when they assemble together for the observance of the institutions of the Gospel, in the remembrance that they have access into the holiest of all, and when they so enter into the views of the redeemed on high, as to have communion in the heavenly worship. In the heavenly temple the Saviour is the object of universal and supreme adoration and praise; but this is as compatible with his directing, as Lord of the sanctuary, its various services in a way corresponding with their nature, as is his intercession. The services of heaven are not exactly of one description, and this, together with the official character of Christ, accounts for the different capacities in which he there acts and appears.

But in many respects the heavenly Sabbath exceeds the most delightful of such days on earth.—Here, even on such days, the necessary cares of life interrupt us,—both mind and body require rest; and sometimes we cannot enjoy the public institutions of Christ. But in heaven this mortal shall be clothed with immortality, and the body will no longer be a clog to the soul. The body of the first Adam was suited to the old creation, and the body of the second Adam is suited to the new; and as we have borne the image of the former, so shall we bear the image of the latter. Flesh and blood, in their present state, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; corruption cannot inherit incorruption; so that these bodies of ours, before we can fully enter into the sacred



joys of the upper sanctuary, must be changed, and made like the glorified body of the Saviour.

The hope of the resurrection is not the mere expectation, that our bodies shall again be linked to a piece of matter,—which were no dignified anticipation; but that, as the present body is of essential use to the mind, being the medium through which it holds communication with sensible objects, so the resurrection body shall be possessed of organs and of senses adapted to the heavenly world, which will make it a handmaid to the soul—the means of increasing its knowledge, and, consequently, its devotion and blessedness. This is a prospect worthy of a rational being, and suited to a heart set upon spiritual things.

There will be nothing, then, to distract our attention, either in ourselves or in surrounding objects. Our faculties here are weak and imperfect,—we comprehend but little of God and divine things,—we soon tire in the contemplation of the most interesting objects, our minds wander, and often are they crowded by vain thoughts. But in heaven we shall no more have a dead, a cold, or a wandering heart; for the glories thrown open to view will animate the attention, give a glow to the sentiments of the mind, and vigour to the spirit. The mind will be purified from every sinful disposition, and invigorated in every sacred principle; and having an incorruptible body, as well as a pure and holy spirit, we shall feel no hindrance to our hallowed pursuits. There the senses will not, as in this world, ensnare the affections, nor will the imagination pollute the heart. There all shall see God, and our fellowship with him shall be close and complete.

There will be nothing in those about us, any more than in ourselves, to mar our exercises or our enjoyments; for there every one will be active, spiritual, and holy. In this pure and tranquil assembly we shall be holy and happy; and in looking to a society perfect in holiness, we shall be animated and active; for such is the human mind, that it assimilates itself to surrounding objects,



and catches the spirit of what is familiar to it. In heaven there will not be one jarring string. The redeemed from all nations, peoples, and tongues, shall constitute one grand assembly—shall assist and animate the devotion of each other, and increase each other's triumph and joy.

This Sabbatism will be eternal.—Here our sweetest days soon come to a close; many of them we have seen pass away, the remembrance of which is still pleasing, though, because of our sins, it is in some respects painful. But in heaven the redeemed will meet never to part;—there is no night there;—our sun shall never go down;—we shall be pillars in the temple of God, and shall no more go out. Because Christ liveth for ever we also shall live, and ever be with him to behold his glory. We shall be like him in body and in mind, in character and condition, and in glory and blessedness. In this blessed society love will be perfected. Here there will be no clashing of interests, no opposition of sentiments, or dispositions and temper. In this hallowed abode Jesus sits as head; and far asunder and scattered as his people once were, they shall all of them be brought to the heavenly and the eternal temple, where they shall celebrate a jubilee of unutterable, yea inconceivable joy.

This hope should excite our gratitude. We lost happiness by leaving the only fountain of it, God himself; we can only recover and preserve it by returning and cleaving to him. He hath opened a way for our return to him, and hath exhibited to us the most pure and exalted enjoyments as his gift through Christ. We are not left, then, to weary ourselves seeking rest, and finding none—we have it clearly set before us. Let us then think of our great leader, who hath gone before us, and let us labour “to enter into his rest.” Let us rejoice in the prospect of being with him, where we shall behold the wondrous character of God, and shall be the subjects of its transforming power. Heaven is the presence of Christ and his people, perfect de-



liverance from sin, and positive likeness to God. Is it not the cause of much poignant sorrow to us that sin still cleaves to us, that it mingles with our most solemn services, and mars our most sacred joys? Is not heaven endeared to us by this, that we shall be holy as God is holy, and so be the objects of the divine complacency? We rejoice in the hope of glory, not merely because we shall be freed from all trials, calamities, and sorrows, and shall be perfectly happy, but chiefly because there we shall be purified from all that is base and impure—shall behold the divine glory in the Redeemer, and shall be perpetually delighted with new accessions of knowledge, holiness, and spiritual bliss. It is to this that our highest hopes are turned, and it is this that hallows and delights our spirits in the prospect of futurity. The Saviour will present his church holy and unblamable in the sight of Jehovah, and will thus gratify the desires of his people, and consummate their joys. How sweet the thought that we shall lie down at the close of our day below—fall asleep in Christ, and open our eyes on a Sabbath in which the glories of the new creation shall be fully displayed, our souls satisfied with the likeness of God, and our hearts animated with the spirit of the heavenly family! It is our duty, and likewise our high privilege, to enter by faith into this wonderful assembly, and to join the innumerable multitude of the redeemed in giving praise to him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. The very anticipation of bliss so exalted, feeble as is our highest conception of it, is fitted to fill with joy inexpressible; and what then must it be to enjoy it in all its grandeur and spiritual glory! Here, even in our highest joys, we see only as in a glass darkly; but in the life to come we shall see God face to face. In the heavenly rest we shall remember all the way in which we have been led through the wilderness, and there shall “we be glad according to the days wherein we have been afflicted, and the years wherein we have seen evil.”

This sabbatism will be very different from that enjoy-



ed in the earthly paradise. Not only have we life, but life "more abundantly," through Christ, who hath not merely restored what was lost, but hath raised to bliss inconceivably higher. In the garden of Eden, Adam contemplated the divine wisdom, power, and goodness, as manifested in creation and providence; but the display was but partial, and the effect on him corresponded to that partial display. Inadequate as it was, it was the only mould on which his character could be formed in that state of things. Though there ~~was~~ no contrariety in his mind to the character of God, there was not that degree of positive resemblance which may now be attained, and of course his happiness could not be equal to that of the redeemed. The view which he had of creative beneficial kindness, and unstained purity, was a very scanty exhibition of Him who inhabiteth eternity. The power, wisdom, and goodness of God, are much more displayed in the Gospel of peace, and there we see also the divine mercy and grace, of which Adam knew nothing, in connection with the holiness and justice of Heaven. It is the glory of the Gospel that it makes manifest how the God of holiness and righteousness,—who from the perfection of his very goodness, must hold sin in utter abhorrence, and must, as the Ruler of all things, decidedly condemn it,—can not only grant forgiveness to sinners, but elevate them to a state of such grandeur as the earthly paradise can but very faintly illustrate, and with which it can hardly be compared. The plan of redemption is expressly intended to be a comprehensive and adequate exhibition of the character of God. Here he is seen, not merely as he appears in the works of nature, even in their highest glory, in which little can be known of him; but in a light which is calculated to satisfy the most enlarged desires, and the most important cravings of the heart. The views given of him in the earthly paradise were suited to the state of Adam, but the exhibition of his character in the Gospel is connected with the glory and blessedness of the Lord from heaven.



The full blaze of his glory will not be seen by us till we enter the invisible world. We have yet to learn what is the fullness of the divine character, but the hope of seeing it fills with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

There is an unspeakable pleasure in contemplating the glory of God, as manifested in making the entrance of sin and misery into the world, the occasion of a full display of his character. His wisdom and goodness have educa~~ed~~<sup>ed</sup> from the fall a more stable and perfect order of things, both in relation to his own glory and to the spiritual perfection and happiness of man, than that which existed before. From the entrance of sin there arose a series of actions which, in the scheme of redemption, exhibit the divine character in a much more definite and endearing light than it otherwise could have been.

In his first estate, man, as an upright creature, expressed the majesty of God, by obedience to his will; but as there was no distress to invigorate and display the excellence of piety, so there was no room for a manifestation of the divine delight in excellence thus tried and displayed. Had our Lord, supposing it to be possible, been in possession of the same power to save us which he now has, but without having had previous trial of our infirmities and sufferings, neither our present consolations, nor our future blessedness, could have been what they are. This, however, could not have been the character of our Redeemer, not only because in that case our guilt had not been expiated, but also because the character of God had not been fully manifested. We should have wanted that bright display and pattern of every possible excellence, which is seen in his humiliation and sufferings, and we could not have been conformed to it, and thus assimilated to the whole of the divine character. In such circumstances, heaven had not been what it now is, even had it been possible for us to have been admitted to it.

If we always enjoyed ease and worldly prosperity,



one important and great mark of resemblance to the Saviour would unavoidably be wanting in us, as we should be in a condition which must of necessity preclude us from imitating the transcendent qualities which adorned his character as the afflicted one. But when we are called to partake of the afflictions of the body of Christ, and to fill up that portion of them which falls to our share among all his genuine disciples, Col. i. 24.; we are put in a condition to resemble him more completely than otherwise we could have done. The meaning of the apostle in the passage I have just referred to, cannot be, that the sufferings and atoning work of Christ were imperfect, or that any thing could be added to his righteousness; but as the Saviour is the head of his body the church, so he uses the appellation *Christ*, to include the members as well as the head, 1 Cor. xii. 12. Now, as the members are destined to be conformed to him in glory, it is necessary, in order to this, that they be previously so in sufferings; and as when the members were persecuted, the head complained from heaven, Acts ix. 4. so here the afflictions of the people of Christ are called his afflictions, because they are borne by his members, with whom, as their head, he tenderly sympathises, and also because many of them are endured in the profession of his truth. Of these afflictions, a certain measure is allotted to every Christian, and his enduring of them is necessary to fill up his proportion of what is appointed to the whole; and as each member is designed to promote the general good, his share is borne for the sake of the body of Christ, which is the church.

This conformity to him as a meek and cheerful sufferer, invigorates the great principles of genuine religion, and capacitates us for more enlarged enjoyment. It is consequently fitted to increase the strength of our hope in this world of trial, Rom. v. 4, 5. and the measure of our bliss in the world to come, 2 Cor. iv. 17. Though here we shall have tribulation, yet in him we have peace; and amidst all our troubles we have reason to rejoice.



since he hath overcome the world, and hath done so to ensure us the victory at last, John xvi. 33. This is the blessed inference to be drawn from his victory over all the evils that we have to encounter below. Indeed the mere fact that he overcame the world and all our enemies when they attacked him, could not of itself comfort and encourage us. So far from this, the recollection of his dignity and power, and of our insignificance and weakness, if we dwell not on his public character, may damp our spirits in the prospect of the conflict. But the recollection that he fought as our leader, that in this character he was attacked, that it was in our cause he combated and conquered, that our enemies are thus enfeebled, that he lives and reigns that he may be the Captain of our salvation, and that he hath promised to give us the victory, must animate and embolden us in our warfare. Surely he who hath thus conquered may well ask us to confide in him, and to engage every foe, in the firm persuasion that, through him that loved us, we shall be more than conquerors. Since all that happens in the present state leaves a permanent impression on our eternity, and constitutes its happiness or misery, how precious the privilege of the guidance of him who is head over all things for the sake of his church, and who is making all the occurrences of this fleeting scene work together for our good. At first by his creating power he stamped beauty upon that which before was all confusion and darkness; but he gives a more striking display of his character, when in the new creation he makes disorder and deformity give place to moral and spiritual harmony and glory.

What a grandeur then, is there in the hope of beholding the innumerable multitude of the saved united in one holy and eternal kingdom unto God, and every one of them an archetype of the splendid glories which shine in the heavenly Adam! Is it not most refreshing to mark the gradual progress of this new creation, since the day that the first promise was made, and to dwell on the glory of that sacrifice, which is the founda-



tion and security of the whole. When the long progressive work shall be finished, then shall the Godhead shine forth in all the plenitude of beauty, grandeur, and glory. A new heaven, and a new earth, and a new Jerusalem, shall rise to our view as a fit habitation for God, and the everlasting abode of righteousness, 2 Pet. iii. 13. Rev. xxi. 1, 2. Then shall the glorious Author of the whole pronounce all to be good. Every individual of the redeemed shall reflect the glory of his image. The whole erection will exhibit the very perfection of moral and spiritual beauty. Contemplating his likeness in multitudes conformed into the very image of his own excellence, Jehovah will rest in them with high complacency. He will survey with deep and delightful interest the character of the head of this hallowed community, and will bear with the most exalted pleasure, the songs of admiration and of praise which shall rise to the Redeemer from every side, as expressions of regard to worth, and of gratitude for the blessings of mercy, so freely and richly bestowed through his precious atonement. The whole multitude of the heavenly host, both angels and redeemed sinners, shall rest in Jehovah as manifested in the new creation, as the fountain of ineffable blessedness and joy, ages without end.

Such shall be the glorious issue of the plan of redemption. Who, on looking to it, can fail to say, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord." "The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord." I am, &c.

FINIS.



















